

# Forest Monks and Nation-State

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Study in Northeastern Thailand


*J.L. Taylor*



Social Issues in Southeast Asia

INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES





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# Forest Monks and the Nation-State

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An Anthropological and Historical  
Study in Northeastern Thailand

*J.L. Taylor*

*Curtin University of Technology  
Western Australia*



Social Issues in Southeast Asia  
INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES



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*Dedicated to the memory of*  
*Professor K.S. Sandhu*  
*Director of ISEAS, 1972–1992*





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## NOTE ON THE transliteration

In my transliteration I have attempted to rationalize phonetically and keep as close to the field-work situation as possible. All Palicized terms and nomenclature are in accordance with the spoken Thai — rather than the formalized Pali — though where necessary I have included the Pali term in parentheses (Pali: \_\_\_ ) where this was given to me by informants or where I felt it appropriate for explication in the text.

Although inconsistent with my system of transliteration, with well-known personal names I have followed convention (for example, Pramoj, instead of Praamot; Chulalongkorn, instead of Julaaalongkorn).

With Thai currency (baht), I have used the conversion rate of 26 baht to the U.S. dollar.

The Thai term “Ajaan”, or more correctly “Phra Ajaan”, used throughout in the context of a prefix to monks’ names is from the Pali *acariya*, meaning broadly “teacher”.

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## Introduction

This book focuses on the well-known northeastern Thai forest monk lineage of the acclaimed Buddhist “saint” (*arahāṇ*) Phra Ajaan Man Phuurithatto (1870–1949) and its impact in national religio-politics since the turn of the twentieth century — the importance of which has been attested by a number of prominent scholars of Thailand. In particular, Tambiah’s *Buddhist Saints of the Forest and the Cult of Amulets* (1984), based on the writer’s field-work in the 1960s and 1970s, forms an important discursive backdrop.

Set with enlivened regional social and political concerns, I discuss the formation of a distinctive forest-dwelling monastic tradition in the wake of national reforms starting with the life and times of its now-canonized founder in Thailand’s Lao-speaking provinces.

The charismatic and idiosyncratic Ajaan Man and his widely revered forest-dwelling disciples remained on the rim of the establishment for much of their lives — yet constituted the mystical core of orthodoxy, eventually recognized at the centre. Man was seen as an expression of the confluence of indigenous and universal Buddhist ideals profoundly influenced — as were his pupils — by the disciplinary teachings and practices of early monastic reformers in the new Thammayut order.

I look at the transformation leading to monastic change and domestication within the regulating institutionalized structures of the state. In this I discuss four developmental phases affecting the “wandering saints” leading inevitably to institutionalization, namely, individuated quasi-domiciled wandering; the process of initial settlement; national recognition and incorporation into the metacentre of the Thai state and élite patronage (what I have coined the “climacteric phase” and the “metropolitan compact”); and finally, the peak of devotional activity terminating in the prodigious “*jedii*



(Pali: *cetiya*) cult". These phases integrally involve an ongoing discourse with the nation's rich and powerful.

Paradoxically, the more the monk exhibits "other-wordly" reclusive tendencies, the more he is pursued by a fervent laity seeking the mystical attributes and individuated charisma of the monastic recluse. This leads to "spoiling" and "monastic domestication" with monks associated more in name than actual practice with the ascetic regimen.

My concerns are with both certain structural continuities and discontinuities in the forest monastic tradition; with textual codification, transmission, and actual enactment in the forest monks' social field. Using case-studies throughout, I alternate my attention between the periphery and the capital. Indeed, intrinsic to this study are the complex binary relations and ideological discourse between the centre and the nation's periphery as historical processes involving Siamese and local élites, villagers, and the national *sangha*.

The vigorous reforms under the prince-monk Wachirayaan and his brother Damrong's direction during the Fifth Reign (1868–1910) in the distant Thai provinces receive special attention, as does the administrative and infrastructural developments in the Northeastern Region at the beginning of the 1960s corresponding with rapid economic growth in the nation's metropolis.

Related to the country's social and economic developments in the 1960s, there was improved mobility and communications with the distant Thai-Lao provinces and the first small organized tour of influential devotees from the capital leaving for the northeastern forest monasteries. The mass circulation of life accounts (hagiographical literature) of Man and his pupils in the metropolis from the early 1970s onwards corresponds with the heightened interest by élites and the first royal visit to northeastern forest monasteries. The perfervid interest in forest monks by the nation's rich and powerful coincides with a period of intense domestic insecurity, particularly emanating from the northeast, and the need for a unifying and legitimating ideology.

As regionally popular virtuosi in the pre-World War II years, in the coming decades northeastern forest monks were to become inviolable national symbols of sanctity. Yet, while reform forest monks in the lineage of Ajaan Man were integrally involved in the formation of national ideology and the Thai-ization of the outer provinces, this was not so much a conscious commitment to religio-political ambitions embedded in hegemonism as some writers have suggested. In fact there were modalities of involvement

in missionizing and though Man was pragmatic enough to maintain ongoing co-operation with secular and administrative reformers in the capital and the provinces, he was continually trying to distance himself from such implications in his charisma and individualism, textualized in the rich imagery and metaphor of the universal Buddhist saint.



## CHAPTER ONE

# *Forest Monks, Text and Local Tradition*

Non-action [*akiriyaa*] is the end point of the phenomenal world, beyond supposition and formulation . . . [and] only through “practice” can we really hope to understand. (Phra Ajaan Man Phuurithatto, *Muttothai*, 1987, pp. 19–20)

As the only Theravadin nation to have avoided the “disestablishment” influences of colonialism in the nineteenth century (noted in Sri Lanka and Burma by Bechert [1973*b*], Gombrich [1988], Leach [1973], Tambiah [1973*b*]), Thailand would seem to offer an ideal environment for studying the enduring features of Buddhist monasticism. As well, because of a pervading sense of historical relevance and continuity in the present, Thai monks have not been known to self-consciously seek a revival of the past (Tambiah 1973*b*, p. 77). As a resonance of external pressures and changes, Thailand nevertheless underwent significant internal restructuring during the Fourth Reign (1851–68) and Fifth Reign (1868–1910) affecting the traditional role of monks in a modernized society and bureaucracy. Yet, in general the Thai *sangha* (the order of monks, *Khanasong* or *Phrasong*) has maintained a fairly concise and relatively consistent organizational pattern in conjunction with an active and viable kingship.

Aside from historical continuities — which are usually accentuated in an effort to maintain a consistent thematic focus (C. Reynolds 1987, p. 9) — fissures and disjunctions need also to be taken into account, as Sharp (1962) has specifically mentioned in a study of Southeast Asia; discontinu-



ities and breaks are frequently overlooked to justify an overall sense of historical continuum (see also Foucault [1989]). In the case of early Siamese religion, we depend largely on information spawned by the makers of Thai history (élite historians, usually the royalty, and their benign institutions). This is inevitable in local histories, as found in early Siamese and northern Thai chronicles (*tamnaen*) which set out to reinforce notions of universality, the righteous ruler, and legitimation through quasi-mythic lineages.

Such historical discourse forms a backdrop to this study of ascetic forest monks<sup>1</sup> who have long been regarded as a “third” monastic strand (distinct from village and town-dwelling monastic communities) in the Greater Thai Sangha. The social and synchronistic features (see Chapters Four to Nine) have been discussed in the nexus of a historical framework outlined in Chapters Two and Three, as an interrelated totality, expressing both continuities and change. Indeed, similar to Mendelson (1975, p. 31), I found that the anthropological field-work could not be understood separately from the complex historical underpinnings resulting from some 700 years of *sangha* and state relations in Thailand.

Social and political changes in the wider milieu have had direct implications for the forest monks who have been forced to accommodate themselves to far-reaching demands from the laity. Noted internal changes in ritual and routine within the forest monastery were considered in the light of interactive processes with the vibrant world outside. In fact northeastern forest *samnak* (monasteries not formally registered) and resident inmates were very much part of the fissionable processes of change in the countryside (here, I had no sense of stasis, or social ossification).

In this study I have attempted to keep a multi-focus through a single field (the forest tradition), whilst treating the background and connecting social indices as integral to its relatively bounded constituent parts (the northeastern forest monastery). I look at these constituent parts in terms of the whole and address wider social configurations as they have a bearing on the social field of the forest monk. In other words, based on Mauss' (1974) early notion of “total social phenomenon” (elaborated by Tambiah, critiqued by Keyes [1987]), both micro and macro social dimensions are perceived as an integrated and coherent totality. In the case of forest monks who live a relatively discrete and immured existence, to understand this complexity a number of multiple positions were taken which involved a contextual shift from forest to rural settlements and urban centres (*meuang*), and from the latter back to the forest.



Significant research for this book included material collected from oral accounts, interviews, standard survey methods, as well as published and unpublished textual accounts of forest monks together with monastery histories and early *tamnaan* (Buddhist legendary tales). I critically assessed all material collected along with its mode of transmission and noted how doctrinal themes are internalized, reinterpreted, and expressed by the actors.

I have included in the text numerous life accounts of the master's disciples to underline the exemplary and real-life context of the forest tradition (see the discussion below). During the field-work period, much time was spent in tracing lineage affiliations to the "grandparent" of the present forest-dwelling monastic tradition, Ajaan Man Phuurithatto (1870–1949) (see Photograph 1). Some seventy-two forest monasteries and branch *samnak* (fifty-eight in detail, using questionnaire sheets) in Man's lineage were identified for research, covering twelve northeastern provinces (see Appendix A). Today, by far the largest number of forest monasteries are situated in the far northern part of the Northeastern Region where most of Man's second- and third-generation pupils chose to reside, especially the provinces of Norngkhaai, Loei, Udonthanaai, Sakon Nakhorn, and Nakhorn Phanom.

Whilst the main focus has been on Ajaan Man's inner circle of now well-documented first-generation disciples, most of whom became famous through "routinization"<sup>2</sup> towards the end of their lives, there were many anonymous reclusive forest monks who lived and died in rustication, of whom a little is known about from oral accounts. Informants in isolated villages in the northeast would occasionally relate tales of wandering ascetics who founded *samnak* in nearby forest, long since gone (as we shall see later, along with the forests). It should be remembered that it is not only the charisma of the leader that is "routinized" but direct pupillages, those disciples who claim the founding master, or his first pupils, as their teacher. These are the monks featured in limited cremation texts<sup>3</sup> or in monastery histories as founders and agents of monastic reform, special celebration texts (such as in the setting of *Phatthasiimaa* [Pali: *Baddhasima*], the *chorfaa* "spire", and centennial celebrations). These were forest dwellers whose monasteries became the focus of popular *jedii* cults after their demise and acclaimed nationally as saints (*arahan*).

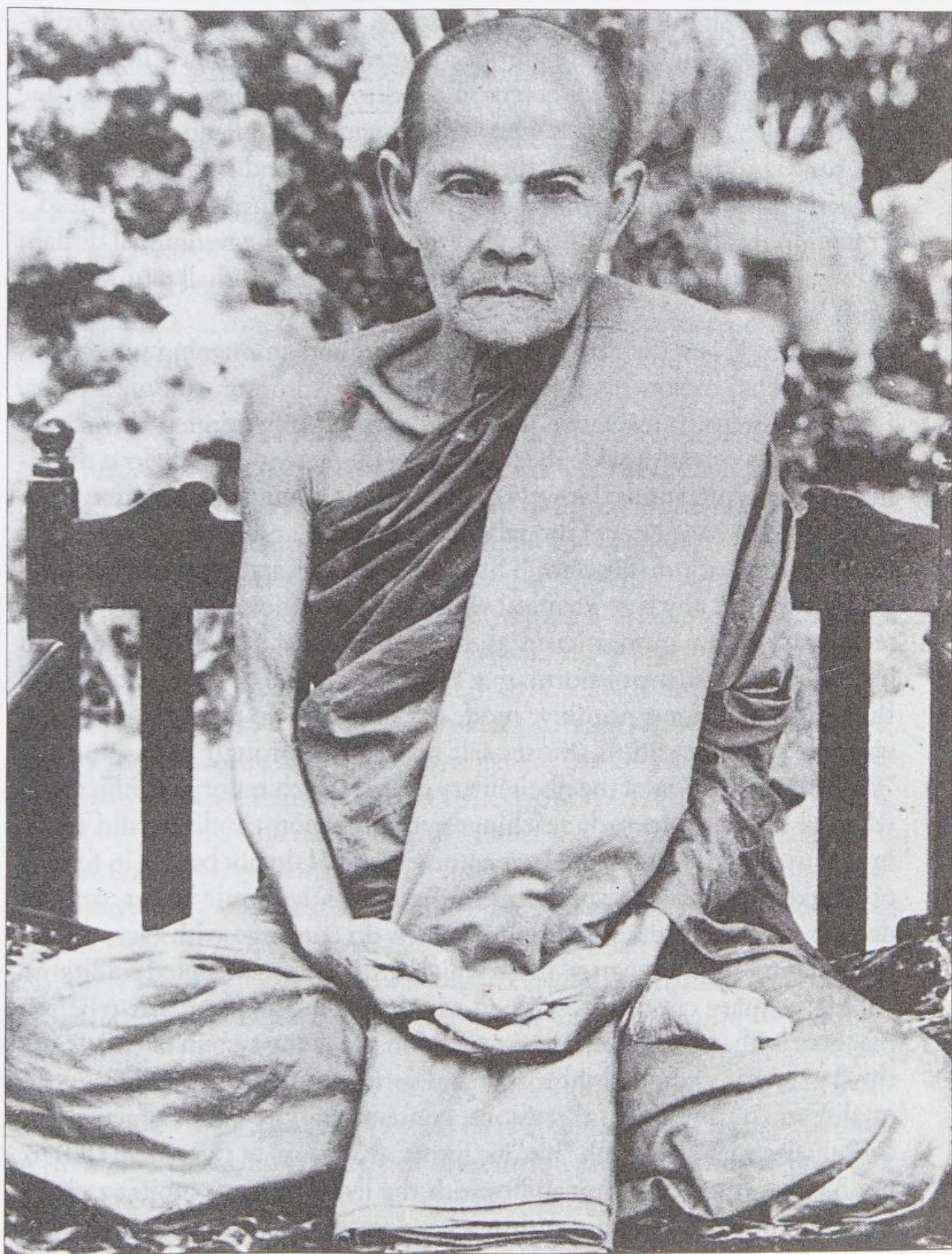
## FOREST DWELLING, REFORM AS HISTORICAL PROCESS

In collecting and interpreting material (oral and written) for this book, my



PHOTOGRAPH 1

Phra Ajaan Man Phuurithatto (1870–1949)





own experience in the meditative vocation as a monk in 1982 to some extent refined and tempered my understanding of the subject matter. It also engendered an awareness which, given the elusive and inconspicuous nature of forest monks, may not otherwise have been possible. When forest teachers talked to me about their lives and practice, I was aware of two complementary levels of understanding; critical observation and intuitive insight into the more subtle meanings inherent in the discourse and its metaphor. One argument I came across often when talking with forest meditation teachers was how could I write about them, their practice and tradition, unless I similarly practised and learnt to “see from the heart” instead of the “head”. I mention this because the issue is a reverberation of the traditional disdain of monastic scholasticism by forest meditation monks (I shall return to this later).

This study is set within a regional context and an ongoing interaction with the Thai nation-state, together with a backdrop of canonical bases. I do not disregard normative sources as such, as I mentioned above, and which in the *sangha* provide the foundation for present-day religious meanings and interpretations. However, my overriding concern is an attempt to detail religious categories of thought and action first and foremost as enacted in the forests of northeastern Thailand. I do not assume that “textual” Buddhism is in any way identical with “living” religion, but perceive contemporary forest monasticism as an expression of a parochialized and legitimate enactment of normative historical tradition; that is, doctrinal Buddhism in its most primitive mode of expression. To phrase this another way, the forest tradition stresses self-realization through praxis and the “faithful” application of the disciplinary charter which is not in conflict with what we know of the early teachings and injunctions, codified and transmitted in the Pali Canon and later commentaries. I do not believe in forcing observed contemporary practices into a normative strait jacket, only in dealing with those doctrinal points which do converge with facts on the ground (and for that matter, those which diverge from accepted tradition).

My primary concern is with an assessment of the particular religious practices in the northeastern forest tradition as a living system of beliefs and ritual practices set in their historical and socio-cultural context. Within the totality of continuities and tensions, contemporary religious practices are continually interacting with “historic forms” (Kitigawa, in F. Reynolds [1976, p. 43]); a tortuous interminability with the living religion subject to both transformation and reaffirmation with doctrinal bases. In general, I see



cultural situations in constant flux and a “perpetual historically sensitive state of resistance and accommodation to broader processes of influence” (Marcus and Fischer 1986, p. 78).

In discussing the internal dimensions of *sangha* organization I was concerned with the relations between individuals within their own collective groups; social hierarchy, the performance of monastic discipline, calendrical *sangha* ceremonies, and other collective rituals which express a high endurability. I was also concerned with aspects of forest monastic life and internal organization which are no longer enacted, either because they cease to have relevance in a contemporary context, or because forest monks long since abandoned them in favour of modified practices (significantly as a result of interaction with the macro society).

The eremitic forest tradition is perceived as the extreme polarity to the worldly householder (*kharaawaat* or *khareuhat*) and among the urban and village *sangha*. It is a minority reclusive vocation of worldly renouncers who have purposely negated mundane sociality. As Obeyesekere (1976) mentions in general, the renouncer leaves the “organised space of home and settlement (village) for homelessness and the formless wilderness”. This is explicit in the primitive ritual recitation of monk (*bhikkhu*) ordination to “wander forth out of the home into the homeless state” (in Weber’s words, “contemplative flight”), which for forest monks may entail a more or less permanent rejection of the family, professional or monastic careers.

Nur Yalman (1962), who worked in Sri Lanka during the mid-1950s, says that these monks regarded themselves as “true *bhikkhu*” in the classic formulation, contrasting with the more socialized reconciliatory village and town monks. Yalman describes the life ways of these cave-dwelling monks at Selave, which differed little with the northeastern Thai forest monks, such as *sangha* organization, normative rituals, spatial layout of the monastery, symbolic meanings, and so on. The monks would spend most of their time in “noble silence” and “meditating in the cave or in the jungle around” (ibid., pp. 319–20). Gunawardana (1979, p. 316) also depicts forest monks in early Sinhalese history as an exemplification of primordial monastic ideals.

Interestingly, Kirsch (1967, p. 157) finds that villagers did not functionally differentiate between monks at a nearby forest monastery and those at their own village monastery, but nevertheless saw the former as behaving more “like the Buddha lived”. In a survey (see Appendix B) undertaken in an isolated northeastern village to ascertain perceived differences among



villagers to “village” and “forest” monasticism, the exemplary features of the forest *sangha* are similarly recognized. But at the same time, the utilitarian function of the village *sangha* was given equiparate religious values by respondents, though serving somewhat different needs at different times. Both monastic typologies (and a clear distinction was made by the villagers) are seen as making a positive contribution, bringing orderliness, coherence, and meaning in the total social field of the local community.

Carrithers (1979, 1983) has shown the functional orientation of contemporary forest monasticism and the domesticated village *sangha* to be diametrically opposed. Those individuals who made a conscious commitment to become forest-dwelling monks reject the “comfortable and all-too-worldly life” of a village monk and “exemplify in their persons a reform of the *sangha* as a whole, a return to ancient splendour” (Carrithers 1983, p. 15).

The soteriological distance between village religion and forest monasticism (though not necessarily so conceived among villagers themselves, see especially Chapter Five) suggests a shift in basic noematic values and normative conception, as Klausner comments:

For the average villager, such a concept as Nirvana, the philosophical intricacies of the Dhamma teachings, or the involved forms of meditation have little meaning. The villagers’ intellectual conception of the Buddhist religion centers about the relatively easily understood concepts of Karma, Rebirth, Merit and Sin ... in simple terms. (1974, p. 83)

Anthropologists (Keyes 1983; Tambiah 1970; Terwiel 1975) find that villagers do not aspire to such lofty conceptions as *nipphaan* (Pali: *nibbana*), but instead are acutely aware of the rise and fall in daily life and aspire eventually for a more favourable rebirth. Yet at the same time villagers make sense in being confronted with doctrinal tradition in many ways, made digestible through popular hagiography and exempla on the lives of the Buddha and his *arahant* disciples. Perhaps, as Irvine (1982, p. 251 n.) finds among northern Thai villagers, *nipphaan* is equated simply in terms of morality, connected no doubt with the stress given by the clergy on keeping precepts. As Keyes (1983, p. 857) notes, among the Thai-Lao villagers, *nipphaan* is given expressed meaning through the ideal of moral “abstention” (*ot*) which one undertakes with the five or eight precepts. The supreme abstention is of course undertaken by the monks with its ancient charter, the rules of the *winai* (Pali: *vinaya*), and thus one would assume bring the



practitioner closer to the doctrinal goal.

Regardless of the exteriority of forest monks to the establishment and their marginality to ecclesiastical and government centres (which accounts for their individuated charisma won through the austere renunciant quest), in the doctrinal traditions of Buddhism they are its “greatest achievers” (Tambiah 1984, p. 333). As true “world renouncers” they have affirmatively “entered the arahant path of salvation” (*ibid.*) and in a sense both outside and above society, a seemingly ambivalent position emphatically rooted in Indian asceticism. In Dumont’s terms, they are an idealization of the “individual-outside-the-world” (1970, pp. 33–61), though defined by their own condition and individuality in the world.

The soteriology of the forest tradition, as presented by its actors, is the most direct spiritual route to “liberation” from the world of psycho-social mundanity (*sangsaarawat*) leading to *nipphaan*. Those who have reached the end are few and far between and, when recognized, receive national accolade for their assumed accomplishments. Those monks in recent times who have reputedly attained the “fruition” (*phon*) itself are by and large forest monks in the lineage of Ajaan Man. Indeed, the forest meditative tradition has long been regarded as a vocation where the select few monks (and even fewer female monastics, *mae chii*, or in Thai-Lao, *mae dum*, or *mae khao*), considered to have the necessary accumulation of spiritual virtues and mental certitude (*baaramii*), are able to pursue to the final stage of liberation. The purist practitioner who turns away from the world knows only “inner determination” and “inner restraint”, factors necessary for those pursuing the normative spiritual path (Weber 1968, p. 20). But importantly, forest monks also work on their own salvation within the constraints of a pervading sense of community structure and disciplinary code as charter), “separate in body but one in thought” (*Vinaya*, in Gombrich [1988, p. 114]).

The crystallization of particular monastic practices associated with forest dwelling — as a historical process, reinvigorated during the nineteenth century — has intensified the traditional division in the Greater Thai Sangha between the vocations (or “yokes”, as Gombrich [1988] has it) of scriptural learning (*pariyat*; Pali: *pariyatti*) and meditation as praxis (*patibat*; Pali: *patipatti*). Throughout Theravada monastic history, especially in the Commentarial period in Sri Lanka, there has been a separation between the two vocations, founded on the basis that the primary institutional role of monks should be to preserve the scriptures (Gombrich 1988, p. 153). The following discussion is concerned with traditional dichotomies which



have long plagued the Theravadin *sangha*.

As far as records reach back there has been a distinction between forest dwelling (*aranyawaasii*; Pali: *araññavasi*) and village or town dwelling (*khaamawaasii*; Pali: *gamavasi* and *nagaravasi*), both representing opposing dualities.<sup>4</sup> These monastic biases were transmitted to Southeast Asia from the forest monastery branch of the Mahavihara or Great Monastery (situated at Udumbaragiri) during the Polonnaruva period (consisting of both scholar monks and meditation monks). For example, this is evidenced in the late thirteenth century Raam Khamhaeng inscription and in Burma during the same period where we are told that the *thera* of the forest “walked alone” whilst the “remaining monks ... called village-dwellers ... walked with many” (Pannasami 1952, p. 92). Henceforth, there were “separate groups [of monks]: forest-dwellers and village-dwellers” (ibid.).

In the *Dhammapada Commentary*, a work which reflects social conditions in Sri Lanka around the fifth century AC, mention is made of two monastic interests, the “duty of study” and the “duty of contemplation”.<sup>5</sup> The latter

leads to Arahantship, involves frugal living, satisfaction with a remote lodging, fixing in one’s mind the idea of decay and death and the development of Spiritual Insight by persistent effort. (Burlingame 1969, p. 149)

We learn that in the formative phase of Theravada Buddhism in Sri Lanka around the first century AC, a debate arose among several hundred monks who had met to decide whether the basis of the religion was to be an intellectual tradition, or an intuitive one founded on meditation practice. Those representing the former consisted of a domesticated *sangha* (town and village) on the one hand and forest monks on the other (Tambiah 1970, pp. 66–67).

Therefore from these monastic tensions in institutional Buddhism emerged the two distinct vocational preferences, although these did not, *ipso facto*, polarize into separate *nikaai* (Pali: *nikaya*). This was largely because of varying shades which permitted some laterality of personal expression as the various *nikaai* were not homogeneous and monolithic entities (Tambiah 1984, p. 165). In fact Tambiah correctly adds that these generalizations should not be taken too inextensibly as in reality there is a fluidity whereby “modalities consistently crystallize into groupings that are not exclusively one or the other” (see also Tambiah [1987a, p. 111]).<sup>6</sup>

Even among many of Man’s pupils there was a distinct category which



retained, not always without conflict, an interest in both *pariyat* and *patibat* (though of course more inclined towards the latter). Man's pupils could not always follow the path set by the master (this is notable in the latter part of their lives when pressures from outside encouraged routinized settlement and conformity). Man remained a virtual wandering recluse right up until his death, yet if historical circumstances (social and political factors) had necessitated a more settled pattern of life the master would doubtlessly have been affected to some extent, as were his peripatetic pupils.

It is the interplay between asceticism, simplicity, and atomicity harking back to primitive structure (and monastic reform) and a dispersed, conventional, adaptive *sangha* which provides the vitality for Theravada history (Carrithers 1979, pp. 294 ff.). Carrithers explains further that ascetic splinter groups in their relative separation from the world, tend to slowly drift back to the monastic norm (domestication) — an “equilibrium state” (see also Gombrich [1988, p. 157]). Then from the main body of the domesticated *sangha* reformers reappear and thus the cycle continues (Carrithers 1979, p. 297). This, as we shall see in Chapter Seven, has important implications for the study of developmental phases in northeastern forest monasteries.

Reclusive monks seeking liberation from the world must ensure above all a radical separation from society proper (Dumont 1970, p. 43). Yet Buddhist ascetics, although situated on the periphery of the established social order, are at the same time “impotent against it” (*ibid.*, p. 59). This will become clearer in later chapters on contemporary forest monasticism in northeast Thailand. We thus see a gradual evolution towards domestication in its variant manifestations. The routinization or settlement process occurs largely from the increasing demands of the masses and élite patronage to the point where the existing disciplinary charter has to compromise itself. Tambiah (1984, p. 73), in a Weberian frame, also mentions that the gradual progressive changes affecting ascetic recluse communities were due by and large to the increasing popularity of forest teachers and the acquiescence to substantial monetary donations. This is a two-way process as there was also a conscious accommodation by forest teachers to the imposition of society's needs within an increasingly rationalized economy (Weber 1970, p. 332). Indeed, in order for contemplative ascetics or religious virtuosi to “gain and to maintain ideal and material mass-patronage” this may have been essential (*ibid.*, pp. 288–89).

These far-reaching processes of change can be clearly seen in the 700 years



of Thai *sangha* history and with direct political ramifications linked to the occasional need for reform and purification of the establishment *sangha*. As mentioned in the next chapter, the Theravadin *sangha* needed the ongoing support of the secular domain to purify itself of corrupting influences.

We learn that the *pamsukulin*, rag or patch-robe wearers (forest-dwelling ascetics), commence living in isolated separate huts dispersed throughout the forest but eventually through influential patronage are drawn together collectively into “groves” (*aaraam*; Pali: *arama*, meaning broadly “monastery”). In time they start to relax their strict asceticism, living not exclusively in temporary shelters but in substantial dwellings though far from the capital (Geiger 1960, p. 202). No doubt the Udumbaragiri forest monastery emerged from this domestication process.

The conflicting religious institutional polarities discussed above (as categories of monastic preference rather than impartible affiliative structures) can be summed up as ascetics opposed to teaching monks, forest dwellers opposed to village dwellers, and meditation opposed to scholasticism. The former representing a domesticated *sangha*, while the latter representative of reform and “disciplinary fundamentalism” (Carrithers 1979, pp. 297–98).

Distinctions (as found in the commentarial works and *Mahavamsa*) between “rag-robe wearers” and forest dwellers are not clearly defined; they are simply historical categories. Both are just “designations for those who undertook the ascetic life, as opposed to the literary specialists” (Carrithers 1983, p. 61). In any case “rag-robe wearing” and “forest dwelling” are *dhutanga*, special ascetic practices (detailed in the *Visuddhimagga* and *Vimuttimagga*; see Appendix C), and say more about the type of monks who undertook these austerities than distinct taxonomic groupings.

Geiger (1960) comments that the *pamsukulin*, who were affiliated to the Mahavihara, seemed to have been an important group and symbolic of committed poverty. Typical of forest monks generally, they preferred to reside in separate huts, rather than collectively, or in a small group of cells around a main central building (*wihaan*; Pali: *vihara*).

From the *Mahavamsa*, Geiger describes how in thirteenth century Sri Lanka the forest dwellers (the meditators) were in conflict with the “preachers” (Pali: *dhammakathika*) concerned primarily with exegetical matters of *vinaya*, while the former grouping were interested in *vinaya* only in its applicability for the meditative forest life. I have later shown that this was also the case with Ajaan Man and his northeastern lineage within the matrix of broad religio-political reforms.



Geiger (1960, p. 202) mentions that the various ascetic splinter groups — while attaching particular *dhutanga* designations — were not distinct “sects” (*nikaya*) but differed only in mode of life. Two other ascetic groups were the *Vantajivakas*, meaning literally those “who have thrown away their [worldly] lives” (ibid., p. 203) and the so-called *Pindapatika* (“alms-gatherers”).

Rahula (1956, pp. 196–97) notes the same complexifying features in *sangha* history over terms for monastic ascetics. Both he and Malalsekera (1960, p. 169) explain that from about the sixth century AC forest monks were referred to in historic texts as a distinctive group, though not as a separate *nikaya*. It is reasonable to assume that forest monks were affiliated to all principal *nikaya*. Although there are a number of references to *Araññaka* monks of the Mahavihara *nikaya*, there is no information on those affiliated to the Abhayagiri and Jetavana *nikaya* (Gunawardana 1979, p. 45).

The *Mahavamsa* mentions forest monks connected to the Mahavihara. As far back as the sixth century these monks, punctilious adherents of “poverty” and “seclusion” (Geiger 1960, p. 202), were known as *Tapassin* (hermits). By the tenth century reference is made to a monastery called the Tapavana near Anuradhapura, a place for the residence of *Pamsukulikas* and *Araññakas*.

Regardless of historical typologies, the fundamental division in the *sangha* occurred around functional orientations mentioned above, the task of studying the scriptures (*pariyattidhura*), and the task of practising *dhamma* detailed in the texts (*patipattidhura*) (Malalgoda 1976, p. 18). In early Siam perhaps not surprisingly, a similar pattern emerged embedded in this traditional predisposition forming strands running throughout the course of the country’s religious history.

Bhikkhu Khantipalo (1965) remarks on the necessity, as he sees it, in obtaining experience in three aspects of the Buddha’s *dhamma*. These are theoretical instruction, practice, and eventually penetration (as mystical gnosis) into the doctrinal charter (see also the discussion in Chapter Nine). In this understanding, one should lead to the other and not be compartmentalized as vocational biases. But, although it seems the separation of scholasticism from meditation practice took place early in the history of Buddhism, Khantipalo argues that this is

far from absolute since many *bhikkhus* gain a groundwork of learning and then leave the city temples where they have studied for a meditation teacher’s forest dwelling there to take up the practice. (Ibid., p. 6)



This is true at least in the case of Sri Lanka.

In modern Sri Lanka there certainly seems to be a less noticeable scission between scriptural study and practice than in Thailand, where most forest teachers come from the village and have little or no monastic or secular education. In Thailand, this was one cause of conflict between urban monastic reformers around the turn of the century, as will be shown later.

Fifth Reign (King Chulalongkorn) documents mention a tripartite division of the Greater Thai Sangha into the following categories: “meditation monks” (*wipatsanaathura*); “academic monks” (*kanthathura*); and the less clearly defined “chanting monks” (*Phra suatmon*) — the latter term no longer in modern usage (O’Connor 1978, p. 131; see National Archives, *Seuksaathikaan*, Fifth Reign, 12/8, vol. 1, pp. 1–11). As C. Reynolds (1972) notes, there was certainly a distinct duality between “theory” (concerned predominantly with lay teaching) and “practice” in the nineteenth century *sangha* (see next chapter). Today, Thai continue to differentiate between the two monastic orientations of the “town monks” (theorists) and the “forest monks” (practitioners).

A well-known contemporary forest teacher, Ajaan Chaa Suphattho (Wat Norng Paa Phong, Ubon),<sup>7</sup> a semi-literate one-time disciple of Ajaan Man, was reported to have said:

If we talk about understanding Dhamma then both study monks and practice monks use the same words. But the actual understanding which comes from practising Dhamma is not quite the same. It may seem to be the same, but one is more profound ... deeper than the other. The kind of understanding which comes from practice leads to surrender, to giving up ... If we have wisdom then we’ll be able to examine this natural mind of ours and use this as our subject of study. (1980, pp. 111–14)

The above quotation perhaps sums up the essential difference as perceived by northeastern forest monks, meditative practitioners who have made a conscious attempt to regain the mystical source of normative religion (through mental cultivation) in its most primitive and simplistic expression.

It is widely believed that the revered Ajaan Man, through his own persistent effort, attained “release” (*wimutti*) from the conventional world and entered *nipphaan*. Also, as Man’s present lineage head and principal biographer, Mahaa Bua (1986*b*),<sup>8</sup> says, in clearing the entangled and overgrown time-worn path, Man showed his followers that the highest “fruit” was indeed attainable in this lifetime.



Many forest teachers, as Mahaa Bua above, refer to the practice in terms of this primordial imagery and metaphor, as a method of “clearing the path” or “cutting through” the mental entanglements (*kilet*; Pali: *kilesa*; impurities or mental defilements at gross and subtle levels) leading to the direct awareness of the *dhamma* truths. In his sermons Mahaa Bua makes frequent reference to his own practice as an ongoing battle against the *kilet*, as do other forest teachers (but not all stress such rigour and relentlessness). The late Ajaan Orn Yaanasiri (died in 1982), another former disciple of Man, says, “The real practitioner must fight (*tor suu*) or be subdued by the defilements and enslaved (*thaat*) by them” (quoted in Mahaa Bua 1987*b*, p. 89).

Suffice to say, this determined attitude of mind in turn supposedly leads to detachment, prudence, and wisdom (*panyaa*), aspects of mental cultivation which necessitate a suitable environment and encompassment for its realization. The forest monks found this among the isolated mountains, forests, cemeteries (*paa chaa*) and, in former times, charnel grounds. As Burlingame (1969) has mentioned earlier, this latter category were for contemplation on the classical “loathsome” meditation objects (noted on Fourth Reign wall paintings at Wat Somanat and Wat Bowornniwet in Bangkok), decay and death, which in turn led to insight into the nature of conditioned existence. The following oft-quoted verses in the *Dhammapada* (vv. 277–79) neatly summarizes this:

Transient ... subject to suffering [and] unsubstantial are all conditioned phenomena, when one sees [these things] with wisdom, one then turns away from sorrow ... this is the path of purity [*wisutthimak*].

This was to be the basis of practice (*kammathaan*),<sup>9</sup> beyond mere conjecture or mundane knowledge and concern about the way things should be, but somehow are not. For the recluse meditator “real knowledge”, or “knowingness” (*khwaamruu*), is the awareness of oneself and the world outside as conditioned phenomena (*sangkhata-tham*). As Man’s pupil, the late Ajaan Kongmaa Jirapunyo (died in 1962), has said, being aware that both internal and external *dhamma* are the same, “one should avoid forming attachments [to these things], simply keep ‘knowingness’ with every in-breath and out-breath, secure within the heart at all times” (quoted in Mahaa Bua 1987*b*, p. 66). From knowingness comes the realization that these things are not individuality, that they are transient and stressful and the attachments to them intrinsically worthless. But to practise in earnest, one needs a supporting monastic community and environment ritually and



spatially separated from the wider society.

Thus many forest monasteries were established in places where few ordinary folk were willing to visit, such as on vacant land abutting the village or on the purlieu of the towns, places where corpses were disposed, forest inhabited by potentially malevolent spirits and ghosts, chthonic underworld beings reaping the fruits of previous *kamma*. Then there were malarial fevers and the wild animals (both greatly feared); the former started to be controlled in some areas with DDT in the 1950s with the expansion of rice production (Elliott 1978, p. 36) as simultaneously the latter were driven out of cleared gardens and rice fields to the retroceding surrounding forests, the habitat of forest monks. Indeed, what more proof could be needed of these eremites' "magical sanctity" (O'Connor 1978, p. 148) and "spiritual virtues" (Carrithers 1983, pp. 40–41) than the fact that they could dwell with amity and wander unharmed for extensive periods through "untamed" forests. For the present generation of wandering northeastern forest monks, Ajaan Man systematized this monastic forest life and engendered institutional credibility in the Thai-Lao frontier provinces.

Man was undoubtably the most exemplary Thai-Lao monk of modern times, leaving behind him a line of pupils many, like the master, also reputedly won *arahanship*. As well, as an inflexion of purity and consistent austere and precisian discipline and practice, these monks became known for their mystical and meritorious powers. In more recent times they became the locus and source of much-needed ritual sanctity and popular devotion.

Man's impact on Thai religion (and through his third-generation pupils overseas, on the interest in forest meditation in the West) I consider to have been grossly understated, simply noted as an aside, and even sometimes ignored by many writers on Thai religion. As well, the problem is confounded by the fact that forest monks in Thailand (long shrouded in obscurity and mystification) have tended to be loosely grouped together and have not always been represented with consistency or clarity.<sup>10</sup> Whilst a minority vocation, forest dwellers have been far from insignificant, either in historical or contemporary context. In a universal sense, although there have been Theravadin *arahan*, quasi-historical itinerant disciples of the Buddha localized in the Thai religious landscape, Man was the living image of these primordial ideals and correct practice (orthopraxy). But there was also a social and political dimension during the period of intense integrative early twentieth century centralized reforms. As an outcome of these national reforms, any local regional sentiments which Man was identified with were



effectively absorbed or muted through a process of “canonization” by the central Thai nation-state. As Tambiah (1984) mentions, in much the same way relics and amulets of northeastern forest monks (see Chapter Six) had a stabilizing and consolidating effect in the far provinces, distant from the centre of power, during times of political insecurity.

In recent times forest monks receded deeper into the remaining isolated forests while the expanding and inquisitive centre redefines its legitimating power bases. Urban élites are now vigorously seeking out the charismatic attributes of forest monks in these potentially disorderly and unstable frontier areas. The encroachment in the sylvan social field of forest monks has caused some incertitude among monastic inmates. In turn this has necessitated reflexive and adaptive responses in the direction of institutionalized patronage (see Chapters Seven, Eight, and Nine).

My approach to understanding historic and contemporary features of forest monasticism in Thailand is not as an undifferentiated, ossified, or impervious movement, but in terms of segmentary pupillages sharing common features as part of the preteritic and contemporary vitality of Theravada Buddhism in Southeast Asia. Historical and contemporary study of Theravada monasticism in Southeast Asia should be foregrounded on the “units of teachers and disciples” sharing common features “within larger, but informally structured, ‘orders’ [*nikaai*] ... linked through teachers’ recognition of their ‘descent’ from their own teachers” (Keyes 1987, p. 136).

In the past, fissures and internal factionalism surfaced from time to time within the monastic sodality, as among the early *Sihala Nikaya* (Sinhalese order) within which the forest ascetic tradition was transmitted to mainland Southeast Asia. In this instance, factionalism took place on two levels: firstly, between a new sodality (*Sihalabhikkhus*) and pre-existing indigenous institutions (an urban-based *sangha*); and secondly, during a later phase between factions (*khana*) from the same parent trunk, the so-called “old” and “new” Sinhalese ordained forest monks. This second later ramified phase may be seen as an inevitable social fact, with reformers claiming lineage purity, vicinage, and semblance with the normative parent. Here, *sangha* conflicts appeared between pupillary groupings of monks on the interpretation and performance of ritual, monastic discipline and practice.

A similar polemical rift to that discussed above occurred in more recent times within and between Thai *nikaai*, the Thammayut-tikaa (Pali: *Dhammayuttika-nikaya*), and Mahaanikaai as in early Siam and, though not as a consequence, it is in this religio-political environment which saw the



emergence of the monastic lineage of Ajaan Man.

The next two chapters will provide a historical backdrop to the specific circumstances which gave rise in the far-provinces to the institutionalization of Ajaan Man and his now largely “canonized” wandering pupils.

## NOTES

1. In Thailand, forest monks are referred to as *Phra [saai] Patibat* (monks in the “practising” lineage), *Phra Paa* (forest monks), *Phra Kammathaan* (meditation practitioners, a common term used in the northeast), *Phra Thudong* (from the Pali *dhutanga* [the *dhutanga* are thirteen ascetic — *dhuta* — practices as detailed in Appendix D], a much-maligned word these days, but originally implying ascetic wandering monks), or as a combination of these terms, such as *Phra Thudong Kammathaan*.

To affirm one’s lineage affiliations, with these terms *saai* (lineage) and the name of the teacher may be added. Historically, records (whilst not revealing very much) refer to forest monks under the Pali name, *aranññaka* or *araññavasi* (forest or forest-dwelling monks). In Thai, early records also refer to orthodox Sinhalese forest dwellers as *Lankaawong* (the “Lankaa” lineage).

2. I take “routinization” from Weber implying in this context the transformation of an individuated charisma into regulated “institutionalized” authority.
3. A great many extant and non-extant histories were produced as limited texts distributed at the cremation ceremony of well-known persons.
4. See Carrithers (1979, p. 297), Tambiah (1984, p. 53), and Gombrich (1988, p. 153). The Buddha seemingly never intended to bifurcate the *sangha* on vocational lines as evidenced by his attempt to reconcile “*dhamma* experts” and “meditating monks”; see *Anguttara Nikaya*, VI, 46.
5. See Burlingame, trans. (1969, pp. 149, 185); see also Dutt (1966, p. 44).
6. C. Reynolds (personal communication) makes a similar conclusion. Likewise this understanding can be extended to the workings within *nikaya* and variations within leading to factions (this will be discussed later). It is therefore useful to look at specific pupillary lines, especially as regards the textual transmission, diffusion, and adaptation of the Theravada forest-dwelling tradition in Southeast Asia.

Gombrich (1988, p. 157) says, “One must not jump to the naive conclusion that all forest dwellers are rigorously ascetic meditators, let alone that village dwellers are more learned but also more self-indulgent. Formal roles and ideal types do not always coincide.” This may be particularly true in Sri Lanka,



where the division in recent times between “theory” and “practice” has become somewhat hazy; in Thailand the division is more marked than this.

7. Ajaan Chaa was born in Jikkor village, Waarinchamraap district, Ubon in 1918 and ordained as a monk at the local monastery at twenty-one years of age. He practised meditation under a number of well-known local teachers (including Ajaan Phao, mentioned in a later chapter) in the ascetic forest tradition. He wandered for a number of years sleeping in forests, caves, and cremation grounds. He spent a short period with Man and then eventually was invited to settle in dense forest near the village of his birth, a place reputed to be inhabited in those days by many tigers, cobras, and “ghosts”. It was thus an ideal place for the meditator (Chaa 1982, p. 3). Although still alive at the time of writing, Chaa is totally incapacitated and looked after twenty-four hours a day by a roster of pupils. Chaa was the most important Mahaanikaai pupil of Man. Wat Norng Paa Phong at the time of my field-work (1987/88) was administered by a senior disciple, Ajaan Liam.
8. Phra Ajaan Mahaa Bua Yaanasampanno is abbot of Wat Paa Baan Taat (less well known as Wat Paa Kesorn Siilakhun), not far from the village of his birth, Baan Taat, about 16 kilometres from the provincial town of Udonthanaai.

After leaving school, he ordained as a *nen* under Jao Khun Phra Thammajedii (mentioned in later chapters), his higher ordination taking place at nearby Wat Yothanimit. His early career was set on *pariyat* studies and he attained *perian* Grade Three in Chiang Mai at the Thammayut’s centre established by Jao Khun Ubaalii (mentioned in Chapter Three). It was here that he met Ajaan Man, who profoundly shaped the course of his career from “book learning” to the forest way of life. When he returned to the Northeastern Region he wandered in *dhutanga* fashion for a while seeking suitable places to practise, starting in Khoraat. Mahaa Bua was Man’s disciple for nine years, staying close to his teacher for four years until the latter’s death in 1949.

After Man’s death he practised by himself in the mountains and forests, residing at Baan Huai saai, in Khamcha’ii district, Nakhorn Phanom, then wandered throughout the countryside until he was invited to settle by supporters and kin at his home village in 1955. The surrounding was dense forest in those days when the monastery was first established.

Mahaa Bua is a natural leader, a strong and determined personality, with a direct and blunt manner. He has many now-famous third-generation pupil-teachers in the Northeastern Region (including the late Ajaan Singthorng discussed in Chapter Eight), Ajaan Oun (Wat Paa Kaew Chumphon), Ajaan Thui (Wat Paa Daan Wiwek), Ajaan In (Wat Paa Naa Kham Noi), Ajaan Phian (Wat Paa Norng Korng), Ajaan Bunmii (Wat Tham Phuuthong), Ajaan Laa



(Wat Phuu Jorkor), Ajaan Bunmii (Wat Phuulanka), and Ajaan Tan (Wat Paa Daan Sii Samraan). There are an estimated twelve affiliated monasteries in the Mahaa Bua sub-lineage.

9. The Thai word *kammatha*an is from the Pali *kammatt*hana, which means the basis of practice in relation to the traditional forty meditation subjects. In the Thai-Lao tradition it denotes ascetic meditation monks Phra Kammathaan (but strictly speaking it may apply to any meditation monk) and used in the context of a complete way of training leading to the application of *samaa*thi (concentration meditation) and *panyaa* (insight knowledge; see early section of the *Samannaphala Suttanta* in the *Digha-nikaya*) (Mahaa Bua 1976, pp. 163–64).
10. Wells (1975) as an example, says that forest monks no longer exist as “all *bhikkhu* are village monks”, though by this he could have meant as a formal division in the Thai *sangha*.



## CHAPTER TWO

# *Forest Monks and Sangha Reconstruction in the Early Bangkok Reigns*

Wearing the robes of rags he may go forth into the forest fray; such is his mail, for weapons too the practices [*dhutanga*] will do. One so equipped can be assured of routing Mara and his horde [defilements, *kilesa*]. So let the forest glades delight a wise man for his dwelling's site. (*Visuddhimagga*, II, 55 [Buddhaghosa 1975, p. 74])

Historical information on a “forest tradition” in Siam from the beginning of the Jakrii until the Fifth Reign is scarce and somewhat patchy. We know that from the Fourth Reign onwards, many of the “reformist” and doctrinal aspects of forest dwelling (embodied in the *dhutanga* and techniques of concentration meditation) as transmitted by orthodox pupillary lines sourced in medieval Ceylon became incorporated into the new Thammayut Khana<sup>1</sup> (the influences in fact came largely from southern Burma, a former way-station for forest monks ordained in the *Sihala Nikaya*). In a paradigmatic sense this reaffirmation with doctrinal sources ensured ongoing normative imagery embedded in conceptions of the primitive *arahān* ideal; importantly, as Keyes (1987) says (see also the discussion in the next chapter), it was also a response to particular historical process during the late nineteenth century.

Wales (1965) mentions that the development of a national religious structure and hierarchy related to the political authority of the king and his administration only really commences from the First Reign (1782–1809) onwards. However, the basic framework for administrative regulation of the *sangha* was set as early as Lu Thai's reign in the Sukhothai period and further



elaborated during the time of King Trailok (the eighth king of Ayutthayaa, 1448–88). Ishii (1986, p. 82) points out that it was this latter-mentioned king who ranked monks according to their knowledge of the Pali Canon as detailed in the 1466 “Laws of the Military and Provincial Hierarchies”, *Phra ayakaan tamnaeng naa thahaan huameuang*.

In the first few years of his reign, Rama I instituted extensive reforms of the *sangha* (Nivat 1955, 1958). After the aberrant period of King Taaksin (1768–82), Rama I attempted to raise the “moral level” of the *sangha* and “restore its prestige and authority”, and thus, in stressing the scriptural tradition, issued seven decrees followed by a new decree each year during 1789, 1794, and 1801 (Wenk 1968, p. 39). One of these decrees required each monk to identify with a specific monastery and preceptor (*upatchaa*; Pali: *upajjha/upajjhaya*). He was also required to obtain an identifying certificate and carry it with him if travelling outside the monastery during the *phansaa* ([Pali: *vassa* — rains retreat period] note in a later chapter the similarity with revamped twentieth century Sangha Acts). No monk arriving at a monastery from another district was to be permitted to stay until his documents had been examined (Ishii 1986, p. 65), and all abbots had to forward a register of monks under their supervision for mobilization and control of manpower (C. Reynolds 1972, pp. 42–43). This, as Tambiah (1976, p. 185) notes, drastically restricted the mobility of wandering forest monks.

The first Jakrii king felt the need to “instruct” and purify (*chamra*) the *sangha*, especially regulate the behaviour of monks throughout the country in line with the newly interpreted *winai*. This reflected the immense political power of the king in the religious sphere and served as a basis for legitimating his own authority and right to rule. The tight regulation of the *sangha* by the first Jakrii king was a feature noted by Crawford (1967, p. 368), who also mentions that there were no “sectaries” as the “religion was completely identified with the government”. The king regulated the day-to-day affairs of the *sangha*, in turn monks depended on a benign king for “subsistence and promotion”. The king did not hesitate to criticize the wrong-doing of monks on textual grounds, and bemoaned that “monks nowadays completely abandoned the *vinaya*”; they did not study but wandered about in the market-places, visited musical and dramatic performances, gambled, and played draughts (Wyatt 1982*b*, pp. 21–22).

Kyaw (1984, pp. 186–87), comparing Rama I with his Burmese counterpart King Bodawpaya (1782–1819), mentions that the latter stressed that monks should observe the *dhutanga*; they should practise in the forest away



from the laity, wear robes made from discarded cloth (*bangsukunjiwon*; Pali: *pamsukulika*), and go on alms-round (*binthabaat*; Pali: *pindapatika*) every day. This contrasts with the objectives of Rama I, who was more concerned, after the unstable previous period and military threat from the Burmese, to tightly regulate the *sangha* from the centre through organizational coherence, hierarchy, and an educational programme based on Pali studies. Perhaps the king's most important achievement in the religious realm was the sponsorship of the Ninth Buddhist Council in 1788 and the re-writing of the canon (Ishii 1986, p. 64), thus, added Wyatt (1982*b*, p. 27), showing his confidence "in the ability of human minds to meet the delicate challenge of ascertaining and interpreting holy writ".

Although Rama I consciously reaffirmed Ayutthayaa traditions, he nevertheless "in a subtle way" broke with the past such that "the changes he introduced hardly seemed significant at the time" (Wyatt 1982*b*, p. 40). As an example, the king wanted the *sangha* hierarchical-ranking system (*samanasak*) and structure to follow along Ayutthayaa lines, except for the title Phra Thammakhodom, which he changed to Phra Thamma-udom for the deputy head (Jao Khana Rong) of the town-dwelling monks (*khaamawaasii*) on the "right" side (*faai khwaa*). Rama I also changed the title Phra Ubaalii to Phra Winai-rakkhit. The reason for dropping these two titles was their canonical associations; in the former case with the Buddha, and in the latter with one of the Buddha's *arahana* disciples (Damrong 1970, p. 42). The king was obviously very conscious of doctrinal bases in his attempts to restructure the Siamese *sangha*.

## HISTORY AND EARLY SANGHA ADMINISTRATION

Perhaps because of the importance to Rama I of the Ayutthayaa model, it may be worth discussing briefly the administrative system from the mid-fourteenth to eighteenth centuries. The system of conferring titles on monks had been introduced since Lu Thai (reigned: 1347 to 1368, or 1374) — a high cultural period during Sukhothai — the *sangha* structure seemingly paralleling the top-down civil administration. The basic early monastic form influenced by the infusion of Sinhalese Buddhism was basically a division of the *sangha* into two sections (*phanaek*), the head of each appointed by the king (Sobhana 1967, p. 4). From these, the Supreme Patriarch of the Sangha (Sangkharat) was appointed, with each section no doubt competing for the king's favour. These sections were the *Khaamawaasii*



(right side or section, *faai khwaa*) and *Aranyawaasii* (left side or section, *faai saai*), each with its own ranking system (Yen 1962, p. 55). Seemingly, during Sukhothai, monks ordained in the Sinhalese lineage were simply classified as “forest dwellers” in accordance with their lineage tradition and its locale or dwelling preference. The head of the Sinhalese monks was known under the title of “Phra Wannarat” (ibid., p. 58),<sup>2</sup> at least up until early Ayutthayaa.

Theoretically, each formal section in the Siamese *sangha* could in turn be sub-divided according to the application of special ascetic rules (*dhutanga*), or simply dwelling preference and pupillage. Also, as discussed in the first chapter, because there is a fluidity within and between monastic groupings (as in town monks spawning ascetic reformers and reclusive forest-dwelling communities becoming domesticated), certain generalities pertaining to religious classifications may, *ipso facto*, be misleading.

At the beginning of Boromaraachaa's reign (1424), Sinhalese Buddhism makes a second historic impact in northern Siam to establish a new ordination tradition. These “new monasteries” or monastic groupings (*khana*) were known as Paa-kaew (Wannarat) (Yen 1962, p. 56), a term broadly extended to include all forest monks affiliated to the Sinhalese order (*Sihala Nikaya*) (Damrong 1970, p. 13). This also distinguished them from the earlier indigenized grouping of Sinhalese forest monks Khana Aranyawaasii, traced back to the famous Sumana's *sangha* in the previous century.

By this time the organization of the *sangha* was divided into three distinctive groupings and, perhaps reflecting the need for purification within the mainstream *sangha*, the Sinhalese newcomers were integrated into the Khaamawaasii (town dwelling, or “House order”, as in Sobhana [1967, p. 4]). This in turn, as we shall see below, sub-divided into left and right sections with the Khana Paa Kaew now constituting the important right section or side of the Khaamawaasii (Damrong 1970, p. 13).

Riggs (1967, p. 75) suggests it was during the time of Trailok that Khmer concepts and cosmological design — itself rooted in Indic cosmology — had an important influence in Siam and where the bilateral division of left and right side “came to play an important part”. The state displayed features of a “functionally differentiated administrative system” (Tambiah 1976, p. 181) with a new department (*krom*) of religious administration set up that was responsible for overall control of the increasingly complex *sangha* (Wales 1965, p. 93).

Trailok's long reign of forty years marked the beginning of centralization



and consolidation of monarchical power with a firm religio-political base (Charnvit 1976, p. 135).<sup>3</sup> Trailok's political integration programme in the far north was facilitated largely through his display of support for the Buddhist religion (as in helping to restore and build monasteries), then ordaining — followed by other members of the royalty and élite (ibid., p. 138).

Having divided the Khaamawaasii into right and left sections, the title of Wannarat or Paa Kaew as head of the forest dwellers (under the previous simple dual classification of "town" and "forest" dwellers) becomes replaced by the title Jao Khana Yai of the southern section or right "hand" of the Khaamawaasii (Wichitwong and Phitthaathibodii 1914; Damrong 1970, pp. 13–14). Perhaps because there were many Sinhalese monks in the southern principality of Nakhorn Siithammaraat, the title Phra Wannarat (or Paa Kaew, as mentioned in the *Chronicle of Nagara Sri Dharmaraja* [Nakhorn Siithammaraat], translated by Wyatt [1975], covering the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries) denoted head of all monks, whether town or forest dwelling (C. Reynolds 1972, pp. 14–15). By the turn of the twentieth century regional connotations were still associated with the above monastic title, which carried with it the function of Jao Khana Yai Faai Tai ("Sangha General Governor, Southern Section").

Eventually a new title is given to the head of the forest dwellers called, in Pali, *Buddhacariya* [Phra Phutthaajaan] (Yen 1962, p. 59), a designatory rank which persisted up until the First Reign (Wichian and Sunthorn 1985, p. 33). There thus becomes a head of the Khaamawaasii left-hand, northern section (Somdet Phra Ariyawongsaa); a head of the Khaamawaasii right-hand, southern section (Somdet Phra Wannarat); and a head of the Aranyawaasii (Phra Phutthaajaan). The head of the forest-dwelling community (Jao Khana Klaang Faai Aranyawaasii), "head of the central division composed of the community of forest dwellers" was based at Wat Bot-Raatchadecha in the capital and was responsible for all forest monks including meditation (*samatha-wipatsanaa*) monks of Phra Khruu rank inside the city. Interestingly, as well as this, he was in charge of the head monks of both the Raaman (Mon) and Lao divisions (*khana*) in the Greater Thai Sangha (Wichian and Sunthorn 1985, p. 25).

A few words are needed to explain the cosmological significance of the early Siamese ecclesiastical administrative structure outlined above. Heine-Geldern (1942)<sup>4</sup> has pointed out the relevance of the mandala (or "compass") arrangement in the Indic polities of Southeast Asia which had direct implications for *sangha* administration:



The system based on the compass was largely supplemented and modified by the division into offices of the right and left hand ... referring to the place on the side of the king ... As the king, when sitting on the throne, always faced the East, right corresponded to the South and left to the North. (Ibid., p. 21)

The whole Siamese civil and corresponding religious hierarchies reflected this basic mandala structure of the kingdom, influenced by Indic-Buddhist conceptions filtered through Angkor. The canonical basis for this cosmological design may be compared with the way the Buddha seemingly organized his principal disciples around him, Sariputta (regarded as the most important pupil) sat on the Buddha's right side, whilst Maha Moggallana is positioned on his left side. This is the reason given by Wichian and Sunthorn (1985, p. 37) for the symbolic superiority of the "right side" in the early Siamese *sangha* as well as the fact that the largest grouping of monks is always to be found on this side. "Right" (south) and "left" (north) dualities may be found in many other cultural contexts (see, for instance, Cunningham [1973, pp. 216–19]). There is also a spatial and conceptual configuration in the association of "right" as "outer" and "left" as "inner". Forest monks by nature of their life-style are on the outside (to the "south", a positive attribute as Hertz [1973] notes in general for its correspondence to the "right side" — though they were not always favoured). Despite being on the outside, they were kept close to the centre of secular power with kings attempting to bring them within easy reach of the city walls (or at least close to the palace). There is also an ambiguity in being situated on the outside of established forms and the possession of certain much-needed charismatic attributes which I shall discuss in Chapter Eight.

Tambiah (1976) describes the Ayutthayaa administrative layout as functioning along the lines of a "dual classification with its asymmetrical or parallel evaluations" in relation to a central point, itself an element of a larger universal system. Right- and left-hand categories are arranged according to this central position as well as "vertical dimensions of above and below and to the cardinal points" (ibid., p. 139).

In terms of actual *sangha* structure and organization, Thompson (1941, p. 625) comments that its division into northern and southern sections appeared to be fairly ineffectual (which persisted until Mongkut's reforms) and that by the seventeenth century de La Loubere (1986, pp. 113–19) noted a distinct lack of religious hierarchy in Siam. Van Vliet's (Van Ravenswaay 1910) account during the same century — despite his super-



ficial understanding of the Buddhist religion (though showing some knowledge of the ecclesiastical structure) — indicates on the contrary that there was an effective *sangha* organization. We learn that there were many monks, divided under influential “priors and other ecclesiastical officers” who in turn were under the “highest regents, namely the four bishops [Somdet?] of the principal temples”, the supreme authority being rested in the “bishop of the Nappetat” (ibid., p. 76). Apparently the *sangha* was well regulated during this period and we are told that in general there are “no disputes, quarrels, ruptures or sects” (ibid., p. 80).

The division of the *sangha* into the above-mentioned administrative geopolitical categories becomes firmly institutionalized in Mahaa-thamma-raachaa's reign (1569–90) (Tambiah 1970, p. 77), and a complexifying feature of *sangha* affairs (Nivat 1965, pp. 16–17). Indeed Indic-Khmer cosmology had broad significance in the administration of a formative polity with intrinsically complex organizational features.

Shortly after the beginning of Naresuan's reign (1590–1605) there was a separate Sangkharaat Somdet for the north and one for the south. Up to this time it was not certain if there was a single Sangha Patriarch, given its shifting and unstable base (Ferguson and Ramitanondh 1976, p. 107). In effect as Siam generally was faction-ridden, so also was the *sangha*. Thus within this totality of state and its religious institutions, the condition of one was dependent on the other (Tambiah 1976, p. 189). It was Naresuan who was eventually responsible for restoring “national independence” and providing Siam with much-needed symbols of order and stability (Rong 1981, p. 61).

The well-known poem, *Lilit-talengphaai*, “Defeat of the Taleng (Mon)”, written by Somdet Phra Mahaa Samanajao Krommaphra Paramaanuchitchinorot (the seventh Sangkharaat in the Ratanakosin, 1851–53, Mongkut's preceptor [*upatchaa*]) tells of the defeat of the Burmese by Naresuan and his younger brother. During a fight with the Burmese *uparaat*, the rutting elephants of the two Thai leaders rushed forward ahead of the main Thai contingent and engaged in heated battle with the Burmese leader. Naresuan won the fight and afterwards issued orders to execute his senior military officers who could not keep up with him in the fight. However, a Somdet Wannarat from Wat Paa Kaew, the Sinhalese forest-dwelling order, along with twenty-five other monks of Phra Raachaakhana rank, interceded successfully on behalf of the condemned men. These monks, so the poem goes, came from both “sections” (*phanaek*) of the Thai *sangha*.



Due to the development of ranks and titles the heads of the various sections were responsible for the administration, discipline, and ritual defined by the king at the political centre and as ultimate authority through the new council of the Supreme Patriarch (Somdet Phra Sangkharaat). Henceforth, the forest tradition lost its formal significance because it had no internal administrative structure (Yen 1962, p. 61), and the kings turned more to the Hindu conception of divine rule with its geo-political ordering of the kingdom (Dutt 1966, p. 81). Forest monks had only the status of “assistant or deputy to the Supreme Patriarch” and were unable to position their own senior monks for the top ecclesiastical position, contrasting significantly with earlier Sukhothai.<sup>5</sup>

During the First Reign, even though — as mentioned earlier — the *aranyawaasii* had formally disappeared in the *sangha* organization, the title Phra Phutthaajaan from the time of Ayutthayaa was retained as the incumbent of this position had to continue to accompany (*taamsadet*) the king on state ceremonial occasions (Damrong 1970, p. 43). Apparently Rama I had been impressed with at least one *wipatsanaa* (meditation) ascetic monk called Phra Ajaan Suk (Wat Thaahoikrungkao) and promoted him to be “deputy head of the forest dwellers” (Jao Khana Rong Faai Aranyawaasii) with the title Phra Yaansangworn (previously Phra Yaantrailok during Ayutthayaa) simultaneously inviting him to reside at the important Wat Raatchasittaaraam in the capital.

The position of “head of the southern section” (Jao Khana Yai Faai Tai) in the Greater Siamese Sangha was eventually shared among three monks with the title Phra Phannarat (otherwise known as “Wannarat”). One monk was Sangkharaat Cheun, who had earlier been demoted by Rama I for supporting King Taaksin and no longer had the eminent rank of Somdet (a term derivative from the Khmer language); another monk was Phra Phannarat Suk (probably the same as the above but listed as resident at Wat Mahaathaat, Bangkok); and the third monk was Somdet Phra Phannarat (Wat Phra Chettuphon) (Damrong 1970, p. 44). As already noted, the basic outline of the *sangha* structure had been set in Trailok’s time when new Sinhalese ordained forest monks became integrated administratively into the right side of the Khaamawaasii, southern section (*faai tai*). During the Second Reign there was little change except in the structure of the Pali ecclesiastical examinations (Phra Pariyat-tham) from three grades to the present nine grades (*ibid.*, p. 45).



WANDERING MONKS, PERI-URBAN  
MONASTERIES, AND MEDITATION

From O'Connor's (1978) informative account on the historical developments of selected Bangkok monasteries, we are told that wandering meditation monks on occasions temporarily resided in the northern Bangkhunphrom-Thewet area, where several local monasteries taught meditation. Many of these forest monks became the founders of urban satellite monasteries during the early nineteenth century.

At one particular monastery, a meditation tradition was established during the First Reign when a "Lao Prince and patron of the *wat* invited a meditation master Chaokhun [Jao Khun] Aranyik, to serve as Abbot". The word *aranyik* is from the Pali *Arañña*, meaning "forest" and as O'Connor (1980) says, implies a ritual separation from the *meuang* (urban centre); yet this monk was part of an urban-centred *sangha* administration that regulated forest monks (O'Connor 1980, p. 34). However, in reality, monks' personal names and ecclesiastical titles have little meaning in so far as actual vocational or dwelling interests are concerned (for example, the title "head of the forest dwellers" for high-ranking urban monks).

At the beginning of the Rattanakosin or Bangkok period there were supposedly three main urban meditation monasteries specializing in the teaching of meditation, namely, Wat Thewakhunchorn, Wat Raachaathiwat, and Wat Phlap. It is not known what direct connections, if any, these had with forest monks.

During the Second Reign (1809–24) a forest teacher named Ajaan Duang had received a royal appointment as meditation master at a Bangkok monastery. In the Fourth Reign (1851–68) and Fifth Reign (1868–1910) one of the above-mentioned teacher's disciples, the highly respected forest monk, Somdet To, "rose to the upper echelons of the Thai *sangha*" (O'Connor 1978, p. 146). This suggests to Tambiah (1984, p. 221) evidence of positive relations between elements of the ecclesia and political powers at the centre. It appeared that Somdet To and his pupil Luang Puu Phuu (abbot of Wat Intharawihan, or Wat In from 1892 until 1923) used to "leave Bangkok together and wander [*doen thudong*] in the forest" (O'Connor 1978, p. 146). Both were highly revered monks and both had reputations for their supranormal powers. Somdet To had been patronized by King Chulalongkorn, who unswervingly believed in his mystical prowess (Tambiah 1984, p. 219; O'Connor 1980, p. 34).



Somdet To's pupil Luang Puu Phuu was born during the Third Reign in 1830 at Taak (in northern Siam, not far from Burma) and was encouraged to ordain early by his parents who were fearful of the neighbouring Burmese. Phuu eventually trekked to the capital where he initially set up his *klot* (large hanging meditator's umbrella with mosquito net used as a temporary shelter which can be folded and carried over the shoulder during wandering in the forest) in the *thudong* (Pali: *dhutanga*) tradition along the river in Bangkhunphrom (O'Connor 1980, p. 35), never again to return to his home town. He died at Wat Intharawihaan in 1933 at the age of 103 after earlier having a *nimit* (Pali: *nimitta*, a "visionary sign" which appears to the meditator) indicating that he would live through three Jakrii reigns; the third, fourth, and fifth (*Phra Kammathan*, vol. 2, n.d., pp. 188–89).

Even a younger brother of Chulalongkorn became a forest monk by the name of Phra Ong Manewt, who relished a life of austerities and refused all offers of "wealth and honors [rank?]" from the king. Cort (1886) reports a meeting with the "small and emaciated" wanderer, then a monk with only five annual rains retreat periods (*phansaa*; the normal way of calculating monastic seniority). He ate only once a day, went about bare-foot without "pomp and ceremony" from "temple to shrine, from cave to sacred mountain" and in this "expects [or it is assumed as a result of his practice] to accumulate the more merit" (*ibid.*, p. 158).

O'Connor (1978, 1980) reports that at one particular Bangkok monastery (Wat Sangwet) up until 1916, all the abbots had been meditation teachers. By late in the Fifth Reign a meditation tradition seems to have become less important and a Grade Five Pali scholar then appointed as abbot. This monk came from within the monastery (unlike the two short-lived predecessors) stressing a new emphasis on formal Pali studies. By this time the new Thammayut grouping of monks — now formally an institutionalized monastic order (*nikaai*) — were the main purifying force among forest monks. Simultaneously, forest monks who acclaimed spiritual prowess were largely discredited, unless perceived to conform strictly to doctrinal themes. In the eyes of leading Thammayut reformers, meditation and austere practices had a useful function only in terms of orthopraxy and orthodoxy. Thus, with emphasis on canonical studies, the Fifth Reign reforms effectively redefined sanctity at many monasteries and the functions of religiosity, as O'Connor (1980) notes in his study of Wat Noranaat. This Thammayut monastery — consisting largely of monks from the northeastern provinces



was to become an important centre for Pali studies.

The first Bangkok monastery built specifically for the reform monks was Wat Raatchapradit, completed in 1864. Throughout early Thai history it has been a tradition to have three important monasteries in the capital with the names Wat Mahaathaat, Wat Raatchabuurana, and Wat Raatchapradit. Since the First Reign, however, there had been only the first two in Bangkok. After Mongkut became king his followers had advised him to construct a new monastery, this time built specifically for Thammayut monks. They argued that it was in any case too far to go each day from the palace to another royal monastery Wat Bowornniwet (see later chapters on this important monastery) for merit-making and that if a new monastery was built the king could control discipline more easily, being situated next to the palace. Less than half a hectare (the smallest area of any monastery in Bangkok) of coffee gardens were used for the construction site of Wat Raatchapradit. Mongkut then arranged for twenty selected scholar monks from Wat Bowornniwet to occupy his new monastery (Damnoen 1964, pp. 55–57).

When wandering monks came to the capital, they would often reside outside the walls on open land under their *klot* and the first phase in the establishment of peri-urban monasteries. At another monastery in O'Connor's (1980) study, a Fifth Reign abbot would occasionally wander in traditional *thudong* style into the forests outside the capital. Here there were also white-robed "nuns" (*mae-chii*) practising meditation. Further, it is claimed that Wat Chimpfli (later Wat Noranaat) became established by a wandering forest monk, who had set up his *klot* in an orchard at the present site. The owner of the land, inspired by the austerities and meditation practice of the monk offered him the land in which to establish a monastery. During the 1930s onwards this was a common practice among later reform forest monks in the northeastern lineage of Ajaan Man as in the case of one of his pupils Ajaan Wiriyang whilst staying in an orchard in the Phrakhanong district in Bangkok. In this case, the land was formally offered to him to establish his monastery which in those days was situated on the outskirts of Bangkok.

The donation of land either by villagers or the local élite to wandering forest monks also took place in parts of the countryside, and especially in the Northeastern Region among some of Man's pupils. As we will see in the next chapter, this was largely how the Thammayut became established throughout the countryside, linked to a pervasive patronage system with the royalty in the capital.



C. Reynolds (1972) says that since the Third Reign the Thai *sangha* was formally divided into four primary divisions (*khana*), embedded in a cosmology not unlike late Ayutthayaa. According to Damrong (1970) and Lingat (1933), the king decided to group Bangkok royal *wat* (Phra Aaraam Luang) and commoner *wat* (Wat Raat) together to form one division which he called Khana Klaang (Central Division). The aforementioned royal monk Paramaanuchit-chinorot (then Athibodii Song “Monastic Director-General” at Wat Phrachettuphon) was made head of this *khana*. The four formal divisions were *Neua* (north or left), *Tai* (south or right), *Klaang* (central), and, in name only with Jao Khana head, Khana Aranyawaasii (Damrong 1970, p. 47). The Northern and Southern Divisions apparently consisted of the town-dwelling monks (*khaamawaasii*).

The new Thammayut-tikaa movement, which C. Reynolds (1972) notes was originally in the Central Division, was not dissociated until 1881 when Wachirayaan was appointed by King Chulalongkorn as its deputy head (Jao Khana Rong Khana Thammayut-tikaa). Ten years later Prince Pawaret was appointed by the king as Jao Khana Yai Thammayut-tikaa, head of the Thammayut (Damrong 1970, pp. 50–51). He was then replaced by Wachirayaan after his death in 1893. With some variation, Lingat (1933, pp. 94, 97) says that in 1894, two years after Wachirayaan became abbot of Wat Bowornniwet and head of the Thammayut, the reform movement with the blessing of the king formally separated from the Central Division of the Greater Thai Sangha, as a separate *nikaai*.<sup>6</sup> This was the time when forest monks lacked separate administrative recognition (Damrong 1970, p. 51); though it was some eight years later during the Sangha Act of 1902 that this was formally ratified (Tambiah 1984, p. 71).

The far-reaching administrative reforms around the turn of the century during the Fifth Reign (germinated in the Third Reign) with the aim of restructuring the Greater Thai Sangha in line with the new civil administration, sounded the death-knell for forest monks as a formal division of the national *sangha* (Tambiah 1984, p. 70). However, it seems that forest monks (*aranyawaasii*) had started to disappear in the formal *sangha* structure since the First Reign as during this time there were too few forest monks to constitute a separate *khana* (Damrong 1970, p. 43). Damrong also remarks that for this reason new administrative geo-political terms *khana Neua* (north) and *khana Tai* (south) became used from about this time onwards (though in fact this design had been implemented during fifteenth century Khmer-influenced Ayutthayaa). Therefore it would appear that the old simplistic



division of the greater *sangha* into dwelling or vocational preferences was no longer so relevant. Perhaps also forest monks had started to disperse further afield from being situated near the capital in a mutual interdependence with rulers as the foci of politico-religious power. Yet aside from the institutionalized forest monks which records such as they are bespeak, there were many ascetic practitioners who preferred to wander about in seclusion to live and die in isolated forests (these monks of course we know little about).

There is no mention of forest monks in the history of the Thammayut-tikaa, *nor* is there any reference to the persistence at least up until 1836 of a *Raaman (Mon) Nikaai* (that is, from the “Ramanna Country” in southern Burma). Yet it is from some senior monks in the Raaman order that Mongkut drew much of his early inspiration (Thanyawaat 1964, p. 40). The Mon monks seem to have been a pervasive influence in the central provinces and spawned a number of exemplary individuals. One such monk, a *dhutanga* practitioner named Ajaan Thaa (Wat Phaniangtaek, Nakhorn Pathom), gained a wide reputation as an ascetic meditation teacher during 1857–1907 spawning an extensive line of pupils. Thaa was born in 1836, ordained and brought up with Mon teachers in his home province of Raatchaburii, and was taught many of the strict practices espoused by the Raaman Winai.

The biography of one of Ajaan Thaa’s well-known pupils (Ajaan Chaem, Wat Taakong, Nakhorn Pathom) details his application of the *dhutanga* in the forest, his extra-disciplinary rules such as staying with one’s teacher for at least three rains retreat periods, daily routine at the monastery (including, interestingly, tree planting), and consistent “insight” contemplation on the traditional thirty-two parts of the body (*kaayakhataasati*), and so on.<sup>7</sup> Around this time there were still many forests around metropolitan Bangkok and surrounding provinces and ascetic monks had plenty of opportunity for secluded practice. As related in Chaem’s biography there were also many wild animals not far from the capital, although these have long since disappeared.

During the Sixth Reign the Thammayut continued the tradition of using the title and position “deputy head of the forest dwellers” (Jao Khana Rong Faai Aranyawaasii) as evidenced by the promotion to this position of the third abbot of the Thammayut Bangkok monastery, Wat Raatchapradit in 1923, Phra Phrommunii “Yaem” (Thonglor 1964, p. 31). Then, two years later, the northeastern friend of Ajaan Man, Phra Ubaalii (fourth abbot of Wat



Boromniwaat in Bangkok; see the discussion in the next chapter), took over this position (Ubaalii 1983, p. 39).

Throughout the nineteenth century the development and spread of the metropole saw the establishment of new urban monasteries and, just outside the city walls, monasteries occupied largely by wandering monks. Even by the Fifth Reign, Bangkhunphrom and Thewet areas still had some forest which the laity would avoid as much as possible leaving its potential dangers to the forest monks. As mentioned in a later chapter, in time these monasteries eventually became absorbed into the sprawling metropolis and the residences of an establishment clergy. The monasteries situated on the purlieu and interstices of social order outside the city walls were centres for cremations and associated mortuary rites. In fact the high proportion of monasteries to population suggested that significant support for their upkeep came from cremations. Only the cremation of the royalty were permitted inside the city walls; most urban crematoria were situated in the commoner areas outside the walls. To the north of the city where most of the new monasteries were established were the growing Siamese settlements, and by royal proclamation the Chinese were concentrated to the outside of the southeast wall, foreigners further to the south along the river.<sup>8</sup>

Wat Saket (to the northeast of the old walled city) is one example of a large charnel-ground and crematorium (see Bock's [1986, pp. 54–60] description during the Fifth Reign) where forest monks temporarily resided. The destitute, unable to afford a proper cremation, simply left the dead to the elements and vultures (executed criminals were apparently forbidden a cremation by social custom and were similarly left to the elements), providing a classic environment for "insight" meditation.<sup>9</sup> During the First Reign Wat Saket (now in the heart of the metropolis) was surrounded by forest and regarded as the "entrance" to the capital (Phra Phromkhunaaphon 1976). It was here that the king ritually washed his hair before entering the capital, hence the name (*saket*, "washing royal hair", from the Sanskrit *srakesa*). During Chulalongkorn's reign the monastery was a centre for disposing of the dead, bodies "were cut up and thrown to the dogs and birds", and bones heaped together and burnt with the ashes spread over the monastery's gardens (Cort 1886, p. 150).

Thus during the nineteenth century a number of forest-dwelling monks established themselves on the outskirts of Bangkok, particularly the north, where there were predominantly Siamese residents (for example, Wat



Sangwet, Wat In, Wat Mai Bangkhunphrom). They “were recognised by and incorporated into the overall *sangha* hierarchy, but at the same time kept their distance from the capital” (Tambiah 1984, pp. 72, 379 n. 33). It would seem, supporting O’Connor (1978, 1980), that it was largely cremations which linked these northern monasteries (including also the important Wat Saket and Wat Somanat) to a meditation tradition. However, although they were ascetic monks intent on maintaining correct practices in line with scriptural interpretations, these monks were not necessarily “forest dwellers”; rather, they were urban-dwelling meditators and Pali scholars (such as Phra Wannarat “Thap”, mentioned in the next chapter) undertaking one or two of the thirteen ascetic practices (*dhutanga*) and perhaps affirming links up-country during periods of dry-season “wandering” (*doen thudong*). But perhaps some of these monks may have been forest dwellers early in their lives, eventually becoming “domesticated” along with their monasteries which they had founded. Then again, although many newer monasteries had a reputation for accommodating forest monks, they may have been only temporarily resident perhaps during the three-month rains retreat, or at certain ceremonial times of the year.

Extensive absence away from one’s monastery on *dhutanga* wanderings may not have been popular with ecclesiastical administrators. In one example given by O’Connor (1980, p. 36), an early abbot of Wat Noranaat even lost his formal position for this reason; he was considered by the ecclesia to be “shirking” his administrative duties.

Significantly, the established royal monasteries mentioned above became important centres for the dissemination of national ideology, and through ramified branch monasteries to selected up-country centres (specializing in Thai and Pali studies). This nascent religio-political scenario in the capital and the extension of far-reaching reforms around the turn of the century lead to the inevitable embroilment of forest monks moving on the rim of social order, in the dialectical tensions and aspirations of Chulalongkorn’s national unification.

The next chapter focuses on the formative Thammayut, and formal and informal networks linking monks in the Northeastern Region to the capital. The Thammayut’s Thai-Lao forest monks under the pupillage of Ajaan Man Phuurithatto were starting to be noticed by secular and ecclesiastical élite leading eventually to incorporation through the expansion and consolidation of the Thai nation-state.



## NOTES

1. On the meaning of *khana* (Pali: *gana*) in the Thai context, C. Reynolds (1972) correctly notes that its original *vinaya* meaning of a small section or group classification consisting two or three monks (four being a *sangha*) (see Wachirayaan, *Winaimuk*, vol. 2 [1973], p. 95) had been enlarged upon considerably. The scholar-monk Prayut Payutto (1985, p. 370) defines *khana* to include broadly “group; denomination; monastery-section”.  
 Tambiah (1976, pp. 335–36) gives a range of meanings commonly used for *khana* in the Thai sense, including the entire Greater Thai Sangha, to formal *sangha* divisions, monastic residential units (found normally in the larger urban monasteries) and, related to this, a description of a monk’s “informal following” or “factional grouping”.
2. Wannarat (Pali: *vana*-[forest]-*ratana*-[gem]) is the same as the term *Paa Kaew*, literally, “jewel of the forest”.
3. For a summary discussion on this important monarch, see, for instance, Coedes (1966, pp. 150–51), Chand (1976, pp. 81–88), Charnvit (1976, *passim*), and Rong (1981, pp. 37–40).
4. See also the discussion in Beck (1973, p. 402).
5. The number of administrative *sangha* officials appointed to royal *wat* throughout the country affiliated to the Aranyawaasii, which consisted also of Mon and Lao monks, was reputed to be one head or Jao Khana Yai (JKY) and seven Phra Raachaakhana Rong (PRR) or deputies (Yen 1962, p. 61). The Khaamawaasii (Left Division) consisted of one JKY, seventeen PRR, and forty-six Phra Khruu in some twenty-six provinces. In each of the two groups there were also an additional twenty non-titled monks, or monks of lesser status than Phra Khruu rank, in twenty provinces.
6. Traditionally, the delineation between various *nikaai* were marked by particular monastic practice and endorsed by canonical interpretation. C. Reynolds (1972) notes that usually *nikaai* applied to monks who cited a “prestigious teacher” or monastic group thereby legitimating their lineage. As well as this it could also pertain to monks who “shared the same ethnic identity” (such as among the Mon *sangha* in Thailand or in the case of the Thammayut).

Carrithers (1983, p. 82) defines the term *nikaya* as a monastic “family” in which all members related their spiritual ancestry to an original body of monks in a “socially reproduced” unilineal descent group. Gombrich (1988, p. 158) has difficulty with the term “group” in this context, but simply mentions that *nikaya* “refers to a body of monks fissile and combinable but ultimately determined by a willingness to hold ordination ceremonies together”. This latter



point is crucial to the definition of *nikaya*.

Heinze (1972, p. 58) describes *nikaya* as a “spiritual association” and “body” (Pali: *kaya*) of monks with similar *dhamma-vinaya*. Bechert (1980, p. 33) prefers to differentiate three types of *nikaya* arising out of specific historic circumstances. These are the “*vinaya* sects”, the “doctrinal sects”, and the later “philosophy schools”. It is the aspect of *vinaya* which is critical to this definition, as Bechert goes on to say that in essence *nikaya* is “a group of monks who mutually acknowledge the validity of their *upasampada* [higher *bhikkhu* ordination], and within the same *sima* [consecrated area for performing the acts of *sangha*, *Sanghakamma*], can commonly perform *vinayakarma* [the performance of proper monastic discipline]” (ibid., pp. 67–68).

As an example of the complexity arising over the legitimation of *nikaya* in nineteenth century Ceylon, see Kemper (1980, pp. 27–41). Kemper reminds us that the term *nikaya* historically originates from the division of the canon into “sections” as in the *Digha-nikaya* and so on. He adds that this “carries with it appropriate associations with monastic learning and practice” (ibid., p. 30).

7. Thep Sunthornsaarathuun (n.d.); Thorngthiew (1985).
8. See de La Loubere’s (1969, p. 7) map of Ayutthayaa showing similar cosmographical layout.
9. Personal communication (1986) with Maneephan Jaarudun, Buddhistologist, Pali scholar, and Director of the Bhumibalo Bhikkhu Foundation (concerned with translating and preserving ancient palm-leaf manuscripts) situated inside Wat Saket.



## CHAPTER THREE

### *Reforms in the Frontier*

Delightful are the forests  
Where [ordinary] folk do not delight  
There the passionless will delight, [for]  
They are not pleasure seekers. (*Dhammapada*, 1977, v. 99)

Having laid the foundation in the previous chapter, this chapter and the following chapter are concerned with the period from Mongkut (Rama IV) onwards and the institutionalization of northeastern forest monks in the lineage of Ajaan Man, especially the interactive processes which took place between Man's peripheral-dwelling forest monks and state élites.

As stage-setting, the habitat of forest monks<sup>1</sup> is situated in the far Lao-speaking provinces, the heart of Isaan regionalism and identity. The northeastern forests became effectively domesticated by the early 1960s, a little over ten years after the demise of Man. Presently, with nowhere to retreat, forest monks in order to maintain their primitive life ways and mutualistic interdependence with nature have had to take a firm stand against encroachment by the outside world (some of the responses forest monks have made to macro changes will be explored in later chapters).

But to understand contemporary events, a starting point is to be found in the far-reaching reforms which brought forest monks into coalescence and the ambit of the political centre and surge of national attention. External pressures around the turn of the century were largely responsible for transforming the traditional polity in the direction of a "radialized" bureaucracy where the king and élite achieved greater control over the countryside (Tambiah 1976, pp. 197–98; 1978, p. 116). This in turn created the right conditions for modernization and mobilization of the people and resources



(Tambiah 1976, p. 198), in this particular case the Greater Thai Sangha.

It has been assumed that the Mon (Raaman Nikaai) inspired reforms of Mongkut,<sup>2</sup> which led to the formation of the Thammayut-tika Nikaai in the following reign, were implicated in stimulating an interest in the Thai-Lao forest tradition headed by Ajaan Man. However, in a general frame, these reforms did not by themselves “explain the efflorescence of forest monasticism” (O’Connor 1980, p. 36) which took place from time to time throughout early Thai history, though no doubt they were a stimulus in raising the level of “religious self-consciousness among an increasing number of Thai” (Keyes 1987, p. 141).

In the case of Man’s lineage, although embedded in the primitive tradition of forest dwelling, recognition from the ecclesiastical establishment was due to a combination of personal charisma and informal associations with influential northeastern monks (situated in the capital) and élite laity. Man’s strict adherence to the *vinaya* as endorsed by the new reform elements in the national *sangha* eventually gained approbation from the Thammayut. But this took time, due in large part to dissension within the *nikaai* itself as well as social and political concerns (I shall return to these later).

The germinal *sangha* reforms of Mongkut were nurtured in the capital and part of the intent to control the national *sangha* and improve the level of textual knowledge and monastic practice. These early reforms, working from the centre outwards, were not sympathetic to the peripheral-dwelling forest monks (and no doubt the peri-urban wanderers whom Mongkut would have encountered were little concerned with orthopraxy). In fact, the traditional forest austerities and the recluse meditative life did not rate very highly in Mongkut’s thinking, although the Thammayut adopted certain normatively ascribed ascetic practices (*dhutanga*). These practices (detailed in non-canonical Sinhalese Pali texts which the early reformers would have read) have in fact long been the primary orientation of the forest monks.

Tambiah (1984, p. 161) sees in this a “paradox” as Mongkut seemingly took certain practices which were the “hallmark of forest-dwelling monks”, and at the same time espoused serious Pali studies. Keyes (1987, p. 138) suggests that this “paradox” is more related to Tambiah’s approach than historical fact and, in line with C. Reynolds (1972, p. 76), argues that Mongkut had more pragmatic reasons and “traditional expectations” for his initial interest in meditation. Then, realizing that his vocation would be lengthy after his half-brother consolidated power on the throne, Mongkut turned his attention to textual interests. Indeed, no doubt meditation was



encouraged for a new ordinand (including a prince), but this should not be confused with the traditional forest austerities. Even urban monks were taught the fundamentals of meditation (in textual fashion) and probably shared some of the same sources of inspiration as their forest-dwelling brethren. At least the *dhutanga* must have been respectable enough to be vividly depicted on murals in at least two early important Thammayut monasteries mentioned in the first chapter, Wat Somanat and Wat Bowornniwet (see below and endnote 6).

Mongkut had practised *samatha* (“tranquility” meditation) and *wipatsanaa* (“insight” meditation) at Wat Samorai (Raachaathiwaat) and Wat Raatchasit in the capital during the 1820s. He was soon dissatisfied when his teachers were unable intellectually to relate the practice to theory (normative canonical bases). After one year he decided to pursue *Kanthathura* (textual pursuits) as he was determined to read the Pali texts at first hand and satisfy his inquisitive mind. He then moved to the centre of learning, Wat Mahaathaat, for five years, and after three years could translate and recite substantial portions of the canon. In 1829 he moved back to Wat Samorai inspired by the teachings of a senior Mon monk of Phra Raachaakhana rank whom he met, named Phra Phutthawangso “Saai”, from Wat Bowornmongkhon (Wat Lingkhob) (Thanyawaat 1964, pp. 40–42).

Mongkut, displeased about loose organization and slackness generally among the Thai *sangha*,<sup>3</sup> also criticized urban *wipatsanaa* monks and ascetic forest dwellers because of their inadequate doctrinal focus. This was important to Mongkut because the “practice” had to be linked to rational means of normative classification and regulation. But had the “purist” Mongkut lived to see Ajaan Man and his teacher Ajaan Sao and their distinctive line of pupils, he perhaps would have appreciated the conflation of doctrinal tradition and asceticism synchronously relived in the outer forests.<sup>4</sup>

During this early phase of the Thammayut Khana, ten urban-based senior monks, most of whom were affiliated with Wat Bowornniwet, were at the forefront of the new reforms. These monks were Wachirayaan (King Mongkut’s son and King Chulalongkorn’s younger half-brother), Phromasaro “Suk”, Panyaa-akho, Thammarakhito “That”, Sophito “Fak”, Suwathano “Reuang” (all from Wat Bowornniwet), Thammasiri “Iam” or “Phum” (Wat Khreuawan), Phutthisano “Nop” (Wat Bupphaaraam), the Supreme Patriarch or Phra Sangkharaat “Pusso Saa” (Wat Raatchapradit), and Phutthasiri “Thap” (Wat Somanat).

This latter monk, Somdet Phra Wannarat “Thap” (1806–91), a Grade



Nine Pali (*perian*) scholar, had been at Wat Samoraai around the time of Mongkut's residence and was highly regarded as an exemplary, individualistic, ascetic monk. Thap was born towards the end of the First Reign (three years before the first Jakrii king died) and lived until the Fifth Reign. His kinfolk had fled Ayutthayaa after the Burmese invasion and eventually settled in Bangkok. The Third Reign king reputedly supported him and had been impressed with the young Thap from his early years. Thap initially ordained at Wat Thewaraatkunchorn in 1823; his preceptor (*upatchaa*) was Phra Thammawirod. He then moved to stay at Wat Samoraai following his teacher and spent much of his time at both meditation and formal religious studies. Thap was promoted to abbot of the prestigious Wat Somanat in 1856.

Thap ordained seven times, indicating the extent of confusion at the time over the fragmented ordination tradition, which had concerned Mongkut early in his monastic career. According to one account,<sup>5</sup> Thap had his ambition set on nothing short of *nipphaan* and practised with intensity and dedication especially meditation on the traditional "ten loathsome objects" (corpses in various stages of decomposition) in local charnel grounds. Thap requested a local artist to show these austerity practices on walls in the *bot* (Pali: *uposathagara*, a sanctified convocation hall where the ecclesiastical acts or prescribed ceremonies of the *sangha* are performed) of Wat Somanat (see Photographs 2).<sup>6</sup>

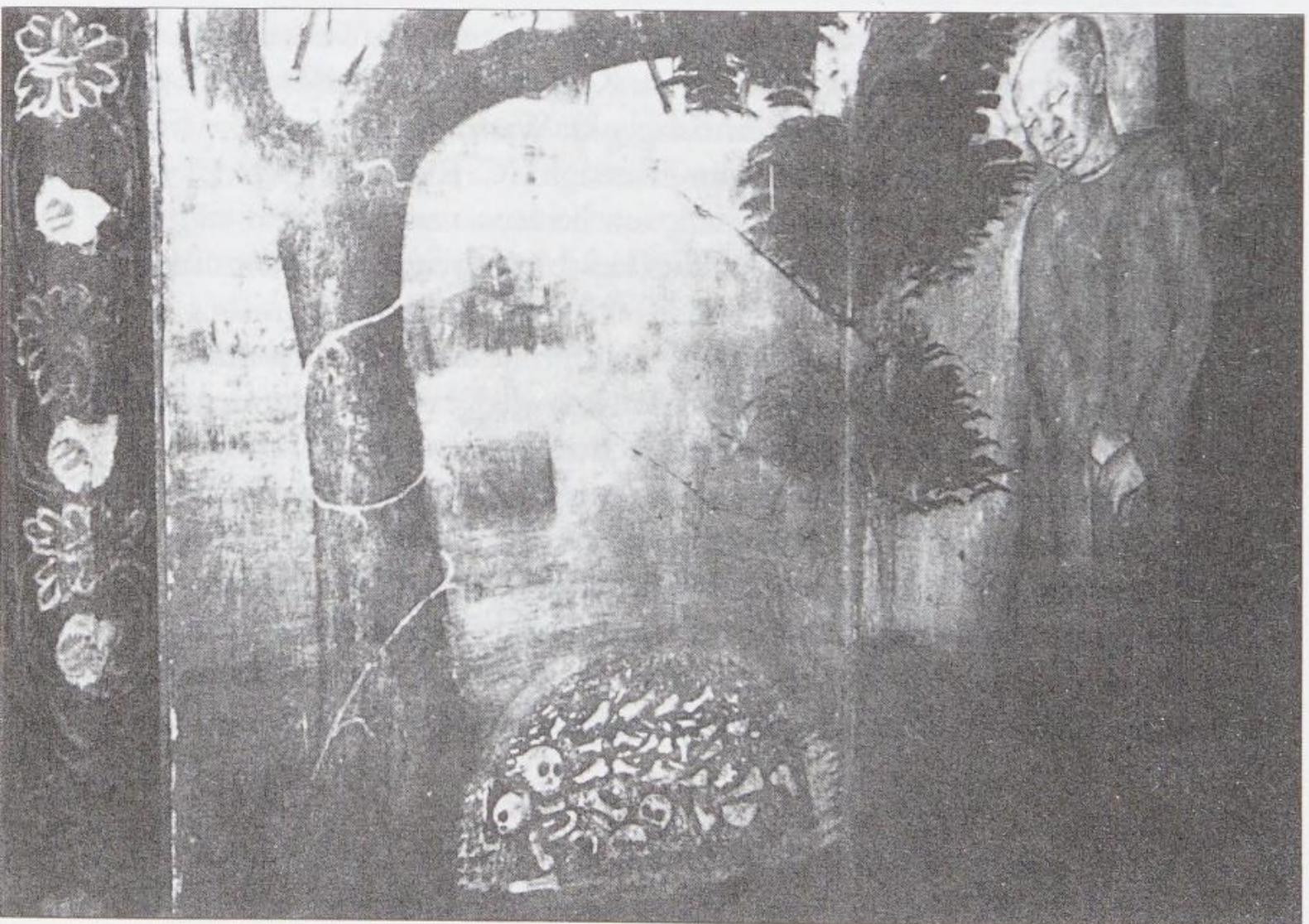
Thap had been very close to the great prince-monk Wachirayaan as he had been with Wachirayaan's father, King Mongkut (they used to go *thudong* together in provinces near Bangkok). Wachirayaan referred to him as a "Dhammayut monk through and through" (C. Reynolds 1979, p. 43) and his normative *wipatsanaa* instruction became a standard text for the Thammayut's advanced Mahaamakut Buddhist University students until the present time.

Seemingly, Phra Wannarat "Thap" was a prime example of a monk capable of combining an advanced theoretical knowledge of the scriptures with intensive urban-centred meditation practice. For that reason, combined with his personal connections, he was accepted by the reformist elite as one of its foundation monks. Meditation monks in the Thai-Lao Thudong Kammathan tradition, on the other hand, largely rejected formal Pali studies at the Thammayut's urban centres of learning and were thus frowned upon by the establishment seeking confirmation in the doctrinal texts themselves (see later discussion in this chapter). Thap died at the age of eighty-five, after



PHOTOGRAPH 2

Fourth Reign Monastery Wall Paintings of the *Dhutanga* Practices,  
Wat Somanat, Bangkok





an impressive total sixty-five *phansaa* (annual rains retreat) as a monk.

In Wachirayaan's autobiography, Thap had differences with the somewhat more "worldly" monks at Wat Bowornniwet, which led to dissension in the movement and eventual division into four primary competing factions (monastic lines or "stems") (C. Reynolds 1979, pp. 42–43). These four monastic lines, followed later by others, were Wat Bowornniwet, Wat Somanat, Wat Thepsirin, and Wat Boromniwaat. Among these pioneering reform monasteries there were certain ritual differences, such as in the way of chanting, interpretations, and translations of some Pali texts and aspects of the *winai* (Ariyakhunaathan 1933, p. 48).<sup>7</sup>

Although the variations in monastic practice among Thammayut monasteries were confined to internal disputes, the disparity and conflicts soon spilt out leading to marked discord within the Thammayut as a whole. Specific practices were transmitted through monastic lines and monks sent off to other monasteries creating distinctive monastic "branch" affiliations.<sup>8</sup> Prince Pawaret, head of the Thammayut (see endnote 2), had in his declining years been unable to unite the movement from Wat Bowornniwet. The number of monasteries ostensibly under his authority proliferated, with many reformist monks leaving Wat Bowornniwet for outlying branch monasteries (Lingat 1933, p. 93). Later under Wachirayaan's firm direction, Wat Bowornniwet succeeded in once again becoming the centre for the reform monks (until the present time). Henceforth, there was to be more uniformity in the various branches and affiliate monasteries, sourced in the capital (*ibid.*, p. 98).

#### DIFFUSION AND ESTABLISHMENT OF THE REFORM MOVEMENT IN THE NORTHEAST

Shifting perspective from the centre to the northeast, we learn that the Thammayut was introduced to this region by a number of well-regarded northeastern *pariyat* monks (career administrators and educationists). These included, albeit in a later phase, some Phra Kammathan or meditation practitioner pupils of Man, many of who had ironically formerly been successful scholar monks. The centre for the Thammayut was in Ubon Raatchathaanii and set up by an Ajaan Sui (Than Jao) sent by Mongkut when the latter was still a monk.<sup>9</sup> Sui, who became head (*lak-kham*, as the position was known then) of the early Thammayut Khana (though not as yet a formal *nikaai* or sect) in Ubon, was credited with introducing formal



Pali and Thai studies which he had learnt at Wat Saket, together with particular ritual practices espoused by Mongkut. At that time he stayed at the Mahaanikaai Wat Paa Noi in Ubon — as it was then known (Toem 1970, pp. 613–14).

In 1851–52, some time after Mongkut disrobed and became king, the Bangkok-supported Jao Meuang (“governor”) of Ubon asked Than Phanthulo “Dii” and his disciple Than Thewathammii “Maao” to set up the first reform monastery affiliated to Wat Bowornniwet (Toem 1970, pp. 614–15).<sup>10</sup> This was called Wat Supatanaaraam (Wat Supat for short; see Photograph 3, the monastery today) with Dii as its first abbot (Tisso 1936, p. 18), followed by Wat Siithong (now Wat Siiubon) founded with the support of the local *uparaat* (“viceroy”) for *meuang* Ubon with Maao as abbot.<sup>11</sup>

Towards the end of Dii’s life, he appointed Sangkharakkhito “Phuun” as the abbot of Wat Supat. Phuun was Dii’s first ordinand. Dii stayed on at Wat Sakaew in *meuang* Phibuunmangsaahaan which he had established earlier until his death following an intensive rains’ retreat when he undertook the *thudong* practice of not lying down, only standing, sitting, and walking. Dii in fact could not have succeeded in promoting the Thammayut Khana had it not been for the enthusiasm of Mongkut, then king, and the support of local-based élites, especially the local lord (Jao Meuang) of Ubon (*Siiubonratanaaraam*, 1968, pp. 5–6). During Dii’s lifetime there were three monastic “cult” (*latti*) groupings in Ubon. First, the old Wiengjan (Vientiane) tradition called the Phra Khrorng Lao; second, the Thai grouping called the Phra Khrorng Thai (headed by Sui); and third, Mongkut’s reform Phra Khrorng Mon — or Raaman — tradition with Dii as the first head in Ubon (*ibid.*, p. 5).

Maao had been introduced to Mongkut by Dii many years earlier and so impressed the monk-prince that the latter remarked that he hoped there were more monks like him in the northeast. Maao was a quiet, unassuming, well-mannered, and strict monk and, unlike Dii, disliked being involved in the construction of new monasteries. Maao was particularly concerned about intensifying his practice and teaching later in life. He died in 1890 (*Siiubonratanaaraam*, 1968, pp. 8–14).

A number of reform monasteries were established within a short time of each other. These include Wat Siithong, Wat Supatanaaraam, Wat Suthatsanaaraam (abbot, Than Philaa), Wat Chaiyamongkon (abbot, Than Sing), Wat Sakaew (abbot, Dii) at *meuang* Phibuunmangsaahaan, and Wat



### PHOTOGRAPH 3

Wat Supatanaaraam, as Seen Today, the Thammayut's First Monastery in the Northeast Established by Reform Monks at the Beginning of the Fourth Reign





Horkorng at *meaung* Mahaachanachai (abbot, Siidaa). These latter two *meaung* were at that time vassal states of Ubon (*Siiubonratanaaraam*, 1968, p. 6). These monasteries were supported by high-ranking local-based dignitaries, the Jao Meuang, *uparaat* (or in the Thai-Lao idiom, *upahaat*), Raatchawong, and Raatchabut — the son of royalty (Toem 1970, pp. 616–17). These local positions were in fact discarded by Chulalongkorn's new special envoy, Phichitpriichaakorn (mentioned later) in 1891 (*ibid.*, p. 431).

According to the official history of Wat Supat (*Prawat Doi-yor Khorng Wat Supattanaaraamwihaan*, n.d.), Mongkut had requested a committee to be set up at Ubon under Phra Phromraachaawong “Kuthong” to find a suitable site for building the monastery. After selecting a site on the river bank, Mongkut ordered construction to start in 1850 and was completed three years later. He then asked the high-ranking Kuthong to invite Dii and Maaao to come and supervise the monastery. After Dii, Phra Athikaan “Phet”, Pheng, and Siiho were abbots of Wat Supat, followed by the famous Ubaalii (see biographical sketch below) and then Tisso Uwan (1867–1956). In fact Man, according to one informant, spoke highly of the founding abbot (Dii) and even indicated that he had “full attainments” (*arahan*). This informant, as I shall discuss in a later chapter, was once a pupil of Man and his comments at least infer apparent respect held for this founding northeastern scholar monk by Man's *patibat* (“practice”) lineage.

Mongkut had personally contributed 800 baht towards the construction costs of Wat Supat and gave a stipend to the abbot of 8 baht per month.<sup>12</sup> The monastery had also been allocated sixty corvée labourers (*lekwat*) for its upkeep. The daily regimen of monks at the reform monasteries was strictly regulated into various activities. These included Pali, Thai, and *dhamma* lessons, the performance of various monastic rituals espoused by Mongkut such as chanting, and meditation practice (*Siiubonratanaaraam*, 1968, p. 7).

In the next phase, the Thammayut Khana spreads to Udorn with the assistance of Phra Khruu Saeng, who establishes the first reform monastery Wat Mahaachai in Norngbualamphuu district, about 30 kilometres from the present provincial town of Udornthaaanii.<sup>13</sup> Before discussing Saeng's career, it may be useful to briefly outline the historical backdrop to Norngbualamphuu district, the one-time reform centre in Udorn province and the far northeast.

According to a manuscript found not so long ago at neighbouring Wat Phochai (originally known as Wat Phra-reungchaisomsa-aat),<sup>14</sup> Wat Mahaachai (previously Wat Mahaathaata-traiphuum) was one of four



thriving monasteries built as early as the eighteenth century. The area around Norngbualamphuu nestled in the forested foothills of the Phuuphaan mountain range was presumed to be first established by Laotian settlers in 1572. At this time Wiengjan (Vientiane) residents were fleeing south, as stated in Viravong (1964, pp. 69–70), as they were unable to accept what they considered to be an illegitimate ruler and resultant factionalism. Norngbualamphuu then was largely untamed forest with abundant wildlife, the rivers and ponds full of fish, and the powerful forest-locale spirit dominating the settlement's religious life.

Two colourful Lao *uparaat*, Phra Wor and Phra Taa — who attempted to break away from the Lao kingdom under Siri-Bunyan, figure prominently in local history (older villagers in the area still retain tales of these two). Wor and Taa were credited with building the settlement with a large group of Lao followers in 1767. The king of Wiengjan, unhappy with this “state within a state” tried for two years to capture them with the assistance of the Phrayaa Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa (the governor of Khoraat). The rebellion was crushed but Wor and Taa managed to escape to Ubon. From this time onwards Norngbualamphuu became deserted. In Ubon, Wor and Taa sought the protection of the Jao Nakhorn Jampaasak (Champassak, southern Laos), named Phra Jao Saya-kuman, but the determined Lao king continued to give chase. After a disagreement with the local lord of Jampaasak, they fled back to Ubon whilst Wor's son went to the Siamese capital to seek assistance direct from King Taaksin. However, Taaksin did not respond immediately. The rebel leaders were eventually caught, Wor being killed and Taa taken captive.

Toem (1970), a distant relative of Taa, gives a different and perhaps more credible account of events in which Taa was killed earlier at Norngbualamphuu with only Wor escaping to Ubon. This is confirmed by Viravong's (1964) account, which makes no mention of Taa in Ubon.

In a complex game of political intrigue, the incursion by the Lao into Siam after Wor and Taa was the excuse needed for Taaksin to eventually respond to a perceived Lao military threat (Toem 1970, chap. 2). Taaksin's fateful expedition against the Lao kingdom took place in 1779 (Viravong 1964, pp. 100–1).

The area around Norngbualamphuu (by this time under Siamese control) became administered by the Jao Meuang of Norngkhaai, who encouraged the re-settlement of Norngbualamphuu by Norngkhaai residents. The settlement was built up over the coming years surpassing



nearby *meuang* Udonthani. All four local monasteries had their names changed around the turn of the century by Khun Phor Khamluan, formerly one of the abbots, for the purpose of “*sangha* affairs”. Up until this time there had been three known early abbots of Wat Phochai and it was during the time of the fourth, Thammachoto “Saa” in 1918, that the writer of the local history, Phra Phothiyanawichai, was ordained as a novice. There is no indication of the number of previous monks and novices at Wat Mahaachai, but at Wat Phochai there were reputed to have been twenty to thirty monastic inmates. Two years later during the time of the fifth abbot, “Saen”, there were only five to six inmates. “Saen” disrobed after a short while and was replaced by the sixth and popular *upatchaa* “Rii” sent “from the provinces” to be Jao Khana Amphoe (district ecclesiastical head) for the Thammayut, and in charge of district education.

Originally, a group of monks from Udonthani, including the above-mentioned Phra Khruu Saeng, wanted to go to Ubon to reordain in the reform movement but elected instead to go down to Wat Somanat (situated in Pormpraap-satruuphaai area) in the capital. On the way all died of dysentery, except Saeng (Toem 1970, pp. 619–20). Saeng then decides instead to go to Ubon as originally planned and reordains at Wat Siithong under the earlier-mentioned Maa before returning to Norngbualamphu, where he stays in a forest monastery with an unidentified monk from Khorn Kaen named Soem. Saeng becomes the Jao Khana Khwaeng (provincial subdivision or district) and Reform Preceptor at Wat Mahaachai at the invitation of the Jao Meuang (*ibid.*, p. 621; Ariyakhunaathan 1933, pp. 48–53). Wat Mahaachai was a branch of Wat Somanat in Bangkok and by this time an important centre for the dissemination of the reform movement in Udonthani (I shall return to the implications of branch monastery affiliations in the Northeastern Region later).

In a third phase, Phra Ariyakawii “Orn” (Ajaan Man’s *upatchaa*) was appointed to the senior position of Jao Khana Yai (Sangha General Governor)<sup>15</sup> for the Thammayut at Monthon Isaan.<sup>16</sup> The young up-and-coming Phra Ubaalii “Jan Sirijantho” (1856–1932) was appointed as monastic head at *meuang* Ubon to supervise discipline and monastic ritual.

Phra Ariyakawii “Orn”<sup>17</sup> was born in 1845, during the Third Reign at Ubon. He ordained in the Thammayut under Maa when he was twenty-one and was sent to Bangkok three years later in 1869 to pursue Pali studies; he attained Grade Five (according to a differing account, Grade Four) and in 1890 was given the rank and title of Phra Ariyakawii. He then spent some



time as abbot of Wat Khemaapirataaraam in Nonthaburi before moving back to his home town and Wat Supat, the Thammayut centre for Monthon Isaan. Orn was actively involved in missionary work (*pheuay phrae*) for the Thammayut in Ubon, and was also responsible for sending many north-eastern pupils to Bangkok for advanced Pali studies and established a number of provincial *pariyat* schools. Orn supposedly worked with the full backing of King Chulalongkorn's younger half-brother Krom Luang Phichitpriichaakorn, the *Khaaluangtaangphra-ong* (King's civil representative or special envoy) in Ubon. The other two special envoys appointed *pari passu* in 1891 were Prajaksillapaakhom (Norngkhaai) and Sanphasitthiprasong (Luang Prabaang in Laos but based in Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa); all three were trusted younger kin of Chulalongkorn. The popular (especially among the tribal *Khaa* people of Laos [Toem 1970, p. 438]) Phichitpriichaakorn was active in promoting the young reform *nikaai* and gave 1 baht of his own allowances for each Thammayut monk in Ubon towards food.

After Phichitpriichaakorn returned to Bangkok he was replaced by Krom Luang Sanphasitthiprasong who, as with his predecessor, also promoted and personally supported the Thammayut-tikaa.<sup>18</sup> Sanphasitthiprasong had already established a reputation as an able administrator at Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa and, as the king's representative, like his brother had immense autonomous power. He was responsible for administering Ubon between 1893 and 1910 when he was eventually recalled to Bangkok (Tej Bunnag 1977, p. 161). Ubon became integrated into the *monthon* system in the final year of Sanphasitthiprasong's supervision, following the other important northeastern centres Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa and Udornthani (ibid., pp. 268–69).

According to Toem,<sup>19</sup> in 1890 the Northeastern Region was administered by four Khaaluang ("commissioners") and over them, one Khaaluang Yai based in Jampaasak called the Phrayaa Mahaa-ammattayaathipbodii. The four northeastern administrative "divisions" (*korng*) each under a Khaaluang were Norngkhaai, Ubon, Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa, and Jampaasak. The following year, however, these local-based positions were scrapped, and the special envoys (*khaaluangtaangphra-ong*) — Chulalongkorn's kin mentioned above — controlled the northeastern *meuang*. Yet, to further complicate the matter, the term *Khaaluang Yai* continued to be used for the three "special envoys".

Phra Ariyakawii "Orn", as ecclesiastical head in Ubon, enforced strict standards of behaviour on monks under his control, such as forbidding



participation in indigenous rituals such as the “rocket festival” (*bun bangfai*), boat-racing, drum-beating competition, and horse raising (*liang maa*) (Toem 1970, pp. 624–25). After Orn, the no less precisian Phra Ubaalii takes over as Sangha General Governor (Jao Khana Yai) (*ibid.*, p. 627), the same position his important younger kin Tisso (who went on to become higher in rank than Ubaalii; see the discussion below) holds at a later date. Ubaalii, like Orn, was responsible for taking northeastern monks (like Tisso) to Bangkok for *pariyat* studies, later to be placed in teaching positions in Ubon in the later part of the nineteenth century. Ubon, established as a province in 1879 (*Prawat Doi-yor Khorng Wat Supattanaaraamwihaan* [The brief history of Wat Supattanaaraam], n.d.), had been selected by Wachirayaan and Prince Damrong as a special centre for Pali and religious studies. However, Ubon had, as mentioned above, been the focus of attention since Mongkut’s time with the movement of northeastern monks to the capital seeking advanced monastic education.

Before discussing Ubaalii I would like to briefly outline the *sangha* structure prior to the turn of the century according to information obtained from a Fifth Reign document (National Archives, *Seuksaathikaan*, 12/4, vol. 1). While no mention is made of the positions Jao Khana Jangwat (monastic head of the province) and Jao Khana Yai (Sangha General Governor), other positions were as follows:

Village monasteries:	Jao Athikaan or Hua Wat
Sub-district:	Jao Athikaan Muat
District:	Jao Athikaan Khwaeng
Town:	Jao Khana Meuang
<i>Monthon</i> :	Jao Khana Monthon

Monasteries at the time were classified into two types. Firstly, those with formal *wisungkhaamasiimaa* (Pali: *visumgamasima*, a monastery with officially consecrated boundaries for performing *sangha* acts), the abbot referred to as Jao Athikaan; secondly, Wat Phamnak or Samnak Song — those monasteries without the preliminary royal *siimaa* (sanctified boundary markers), the abbot referred to as Hua Wat (see also Wachirayaan [1971a]).

During the Fourth Reign, the appointment of *upatchaa* or preceptor was made solely by the civil representative of the king. In the following reign, *upatchaa* were selected by the Jao Khana Monthon, then forwarded to the Ministry of Education for formal approval and seal of office. Further, in the countryside, *upatchaa* for sub-districts (*tambon*) were nominated at a joint



meeting of Jao Khana Khwaeng or Jao Khana Meuang together with civil officials; nominees were then submitted to the Jao Khana Monthon, who would issue certification ratified by the king's civil representative (at this level there is no mention of nominees having to pass through the Ministry of Education). In 1899 there were reputedly 111 Jao Khana Meuang, 223 Athikaan Khwaeng, 899 Athikaan Muat, and 583 *upatchaa* throughout the country (all *monthon*).

### THE RISE OF PHRA UBAALII

I now turn to one of the Northeastern Region's most influential and articulate monks at the beginning of the twentieth century, Phra Ubaalii Khunuupamaajaan (though this is a monastic title given later in his life, to avoid confusion I have used it throughout). This monk (whose picture appears in nearly every forest monastery in the northeast today) — known for his veracious and direct teachings — was responsible largely for the conjoining of the peripheral-dwelling *patibat* monks and reform administrative establishment, thus effectively bringing the Siamese nation-state into the far Lao-speaking provinces. The importance of Ubaalii in this social and political configuration will become clear in the following biographical sketch.

Ubaalii's little known autobiography (1983) written in 1926, provides glimpses into the religio-politics at the time of the Fifth and Sixth Reigns. Ubaalii, though essentially an educationist and administrator, was an ardent supporter of the Phra Thudong Kammathaan tradition and always had the desire to practise meditation in the seclusion of the forests at every opportunity (Toem 1970, p. 636). He was seemingly caught in the middle between "theory" and "practice", and because of his continuing concern for improving education (Pali and Thai studies) and related administrative matters pertaining to the promotion of the Thammayut, he was closer to the centre than the periphery. Nevertheless because of his confidence in Man and the latter's respect for Ubaalii (shared also by Man's early teacher Ajaan Sao Kantasiilo [1859–1941]), he was seen as the senior patron and father figure of the northeastern forest tradition. Importantly, Ubaalii had helped Man and his wandering pupils gain normative credence and acceptability by many *sangha* administrators.

Ubaalii was born in Nonglai village, outside Ubon, and had been friends with Man since childhood. He was also related to a number of Man's con-



temporaries and his younger brother also rose in the *sangha* to become a Phra Raachaakhana ranking monk around the mid-1930s at Lopburii. The pioneering Thammayut monk mentioned earlier, Maa, was yet another relative of Ubaalii. These monks, as with many of Man's pupils, came from Ubon, an area first to be influenced by Thammayut reforms in the northeast.

Ubaalii's father was named Sorn Supphasorn, his mother, Kaew, both farmers. He ordained in his home village as a novice at twelve years of age and then went off to Wat Siithong in Ubon to study for seven years. He had to disrobe when he was nineteen because his father had been recruited to fight the Chinese Hor invasion at the initiative of the Jao Meuang in Ubon around 1874 (Viravong 1964, pp. 140–41).<sup>20</sup> Ubaalii stayed to look after his family's rice fields and then became reluctant to reordain after his father returned. However, he was eventually persuaded and in 1877 ordained again with Maa as his *upatchaa* and resided at one of the Thammayut's early monasteries in Ubon, Wat Chaiyamongkhon. He studied under Maa at nearby Wat Siithong, but after four years Maa became too sick to teach. Ubaalii then went to the capital staying at Wat Buranasirimattayaaraam, Wat Thepsirin, and Wat Bupphaaraam, attaining *perian* Grade Three in his ninth year as a monk. He was then thirty years of age and at this time wanted to give up *pariyat* pursuits and concentrate instead on the "duty of meditation" (*wipatsanaathura*). He returned to Ubon with a small band of seven or eight northeastern monks and novices with the intention of establishing a preliminary monastery (*samnak song*).<sup>21</sup>

During this time the Jao Nakhorn Jampaasak heard of his organizational ability and reputation as a teacher and sent a representative to ask Maa's permission for him to go and help establish the Thammayut in his tributary state. The year was 1888 and that was the first recorded event for the establishment of the reform movement in Laos. The new monastery was called Wat Mahaamaattayaaraam and consisted of eleven to twelve monks studying under Ubaalii. The Jao Meuang or local lord of Jampaasak then asked Bangkok to confer the rank of Jao Khana Sangkhapaamok — a title which pertained to the early system of having a Phra Sangkharaat (Supreme Patriarch) for each vassal state or principality, and was devised by Mongkut (Damrong 1970, p. 6).

However, Ubaalii's missionary tasks were hindered by his criticism of a well-known Lao magical monk named Samretlun (mentioned in Chapter Five), whom he accused of being consistently drunk. Apparently, Ubaalii underestimated Samretlun's popularity, especially among the Lao élite



with the result that he was limited in his extension of the reforms in southern Laos (Premwit 1991, p. 97).

After his stay at Jampaasak, Ubaalii then went back to Bangkok, staying at Wat Pichaiyaattikaaraam in Thonburi, bringing many pupils with him. In 1890 he was promoted to Jao Khana Yai (Meuang Nakhorn Jampaasak) and he returned to Jampaasak that year to establish a school for Pali and Thai studies (Toem 1970, p. 629). After the east-bank territories were ceded to France in 1893, Ubaalii went to Ubon, never again to return to Jampaasak (*ibid.*, p. 630). In fact local disruption caused by the fracas over the Lao territories continued on for some years (Tej Bunnag 1977, p. 91). It was some ten years after Ubaalii left southern Laos in 1904 that an agreement was finally made with France for handing over Jampaasak (Wyatt 1982a, p. 206).

In Ubon, Ubaalii stayed at Wat Supat, but after a while decided once again to make the long and arduous trek to Bangkok in 1894, again bringing more promising *pariyat* pupils with him. By this time the Mahaamakut Buddhist University was established at Wat Bowornniwet and he was appointed on the prestigious foundation committee. After the *phansaa* in the capital, Wachirayaan asked him to go and help the royal monk Mom Jao Phra Siisukhotkhattayaanuwat at Wat Thepsirin, as this monk had not yet attained ten *phansaa* and needed support for administrative and disciplinary *sangha* matters. Ubaalii was also encouraged to sit for the *perian* Grade Four examination. After his nineteenth *phansaa* he once again became bored with *khanthathura* (book learning) and wanted to pursue meditation practice, this time under the well-respected friend of Wachirayaan, the urban scholar-meditation teacher Jao Khun Panyaaphisaanthen "Sing" at Wat Pathumwanaaraam. The following year he went *thudong* (wandering in ascetic fashion) to Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa in the northeast, returning to Wat Pathumwanaaraam in 1896. After the rains he returned to Ubon and Wat Supat, where he set up another thriving school for Pali and Thai studies (see also Wyatt [1969, p. 248]). Two years later, Wachirayaan asked him to return to the capital and he was officially assigned by the king as one of the important Monthon Education Directors for Monthon Isaan (*Phuu Amnuaikaan Kaanseuksaa*).

A Fifth Reign document (National Archives, *Seuksaathikaan*, 12/58, vol. 6) mentions that Ubaalii was assigned as Education Director in 1899 and later on 11 November that same year was promoted to Phra Yaanarakhit. But he did not keep his position long and resigned shortly afterwards.



Ubaalii replaced Phra Ariyakawii “Orn” (see earlier comments), who died at Wat Siithong in 1903 as preceptor for the Thammayut in Ubon. Up until this time Ubaalii had travelled back and forth from the northeast to Bangkok ten times (then with twenty-three *phansaa* as a monk) — a time-consuming task, as Ubaalii (1983) bemoans. In one instance he travelled from Jampassak by cart in the third month of 1889 and arrived in Bangkok in the sixth month of the following year, yet taking only two months to return to Ubon (ibid., p. 13; the problem of travel and communications will be discussed in the next chapter).

By this time Ubaalii was tired and decided to resign his official position, handing over educational responsibilities to some of his senior students. After permission was given for him to leave he decided to go wandering to northern Siam and Burma. On the way he stopped at Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa and arranged for textbooks to be sent on to his pupils in Ubon, but before he reached Khao Yai forest he hurt his foot and had to stay at the mountain for the *phansaa* of 1904. He also fell sick from malaria. That same year he received an appointment as abbot of one of Thammayut’s principal Bangkok monasteries, Wat Boromniwaat, and was thus unable to proceed to Burma. Whilst at Wat Boromniwaat he proved an efficient administrator (up until this time the monastery had three previous abbots) and continued once again to take an active interest in monastic education.

In 1908 Ubaalii was appointed Jao Khana Monthon Janthaburii, and later in the year appointed simultaneously as head of Monthon Raatchaburii, then promoted to Phra Raatchakawii. In the dry season he would go up-country on *sangha* business to visit his *monthon*. Two years later he was given the prominent position in the capital of Jao Khana Monthon Hua Meuang Krungthep (Toem 1970, p. 635).

Ubaalii complained about the poor *winai* and disorganization in the Mon (Raaman) *nikaai* under his jurisdiction, monks who had so impressed Mongkut about eighty years earlier. In 1910, the same year, Chulalongkorn died. Ubaalii reputedly said that whereas the new incoming king Wachiraawut (Rama VI) preferred to let the Sangkharaat control *sangha* affairs, Chulalongkorn had been more authoritarian, much more in control of the *sangha*.

During the reorganization that followed the investiture of the new king, Ubaalii’s administrative tasks became easier, being no longer responsible for Monthon Hua Meuang Krungthep. From 1911 onwards, Ubaalii found time to go *thudong* to the forests (*rukhamuun*) every dry season, temporarily



getting away from his administrative and teaching duties. In 1914 he was promoted to Phra Thepmolii but the following year demoted as a result of a controversial publication in relation to Siam's intended involvement in World War I. This publication was called *Thammawijayaanusaat* and written for the cremation ceremony of a Siamese prince's wife. In this publication Ubaalii roundly condemned militarism saying that the "military sciences" lacked *mettaa-karunaa* (loving-kindness and compassion) (Ubaalii 1983, p. 33). This was seen as a direct affront to the power and authority of King Wachiraawut (Rama VI), who retorted that even the Buddha accepted military might as necessary protection for "righteous" states (Chaiwat 1984). Further, the king argued that Ubaalii simply wanted fame and his opinions had nothing to do with the Buddha's *dhamma*. He was then demoted and kept under "monastery arrest" at Wat Bowornniwet under the watchful eye of Wachirayaan (Phra Mahaa Samana). Wachirayaan set three rules for Ubaalii: first, he was not to teach; second he was not to travel in the countryside; and third, if he wanted to leave Wat Bowornniwet, he had to first seek permission (National Archives, *Seuksaathikaan*, Sixth Reign, 17/11). However, Ubaalii was not incarcerated for long and was released a few months later, on 4 January 1916.

One informant mentioned that whilst under "monastery arrest", Ubaalii hung a bag of potatoes or yams (*man*) outside his room at Wat Bowornniwet as a show of defiance. The word *man* can also imply determination and impenitence. Thus with a play of words, Ubaalii wants to show the king his resoluteness on the matter. Indicative of Ubaalii's character, in another separate incident, he once went to visit the king with his monk's shoulder bag (*yaam*) turned inside out. When asked by the king why he had done this, Ubaalii replied that he wanted to impress upon him the "inside" rather than the "outside", alluding to the true nature of *dhamma*. As well, instead of carrying his formal regalia of office as was the custom, Ubaalii would always turn up at the palace dressed as a *thudong* monk — his usual sartorial insignia. After his release, it was not long before Ubaalii was again promoted (to Phra Thamathiira-raatcha-mahaamunii) and was one of the few monks whom the king cancelled appointments to visit.

In 1922 Ubaalii set off for Chiangtung in the far north of the country where he was asked by the independent Jao Nakhorn Chiangtung to advise on improving disciplinary standards among the local *sangha*. Ubaalii noted that the monks behaved badly, carried knives and swords, and ate whenever they wanted. He added also that they did not know how to chant (*suat mon*)



correctly in Pali. Carl Bock (1986), the indefatigable traveller-adventurer, commented some forty years earlier that the “Laotian” monks in northern Siam had a “different code of laws” from the central Thai, and that they possessed many “worldly goods” and “slaves” and had no “regular hours for meals” (ibid., p. 203).

Ubaalii returned to Bangkok in 1923 and was then promoted to Phra Ubaalii Khunuupamaajaan and Jao Khana Rong Aranyawaasii (deputy head of the “forest dwellers”). In the next chapter it will be shown that Ubaalii became the pioneer for the Thammayut in northern Siam, in a period not covered by his autobiography.<sup>22</sup>

After Ubaalii had gone to Bangkok in 1904, intending to remain there more or less permanently, the reform movement was faced with a problem. The Khaaluangtaangphra-ong had to nominate an uninspiring elderly monk named “Phuun” to stay on at Wat Siithong and become *upatchaa* or preceptor for the Thammayut. Seemingly, as Toem (1970, pp. 650–51) has said, there was no one else available or able to perform this important *sangha* function (ensuring perpetuation of the monastic tradition) in Ubon at the time.

#### MAHAA JUUM, AND THE EXPANSION AND CONSOLIDATION OF THAMMAYUT LINES

Following chronological developments in the establishment of the Thammayut-tikaa in the Northeastern Region, in Monthon Udorn, after Wat Mahaachai had become established (see comments above), Wat Jormsii in Kumphawaapii district was set up headed by a disciple of Saeng, Than Samusii. Wat Phothisomphon (today the Thammayut provincial centre in the town of Udonnthaanii), at that time in district Maak-khaeng, was established in 1923. This monastery was headed by another important disciple of Saeng, “Mahaa Juum” Phanthulo (1888–1962), later known as Phra Thammajedii, an admirer and supporter of Ajaan Man.

Mahaa Juum, as I shall show later on, was a high-ranking *pariyat* monk who administratively helped to bring credibility to many of Man’s early pupils at a time when the centre was still hostile to Man’s wanderers. Wat Phothisomphon was affiliated to both Wat Thepsirin (through Mahaa Juum) and Wat Somanat (through the earlier Saeng as Mahaa Juum’s *upatchaa*). Simultaneously, Wat Norngsawan and Wat Yothaanimit were set up by Mahaa Juum and regarded as branches of Wat Thepsirin. Lines between the



centre and the northeastern countryside were by now starting to be clearly drawn through the efforts of monks such as Mahaa Juum. In fact it seems that Mahaa Juum was regarded by the central administration as a particularly useful “pioneering” Thammayut monk in Monthon Udorn (Thet 1978).

Mahaa Juum was a very popular northeastern administrative monk originally from Nakhorn Phanom. He went to Wat Thepsirin for *perian* studies (Grade Three), then later was invited by the *uparaat* in Monthon Udorn to come and reside at Wat Phothisomphon as assistant — then later, Jao Khana Jangwat (provincial head for the Thammayut). Mahaa Juum was also the abbot of Wat Phothisomphon and the *upatchaa* for the reform *nikaai* (Ariyakhunaathan 1933, pp. 54–55; Toem 1970, p. 655). After Mahaa Juum returned to Udorn on completion of his studies at Wat Thepsirin (according to Thet 1978, p. 180, this was during the laying of the foundation stone ceremony for the consecration hall, or *bot* [Pali: *uposathagara*] at Wat Phothisomphon), he rekindled his interest in meditation and support for Man’s growing lineage (see also Chapter Eight).

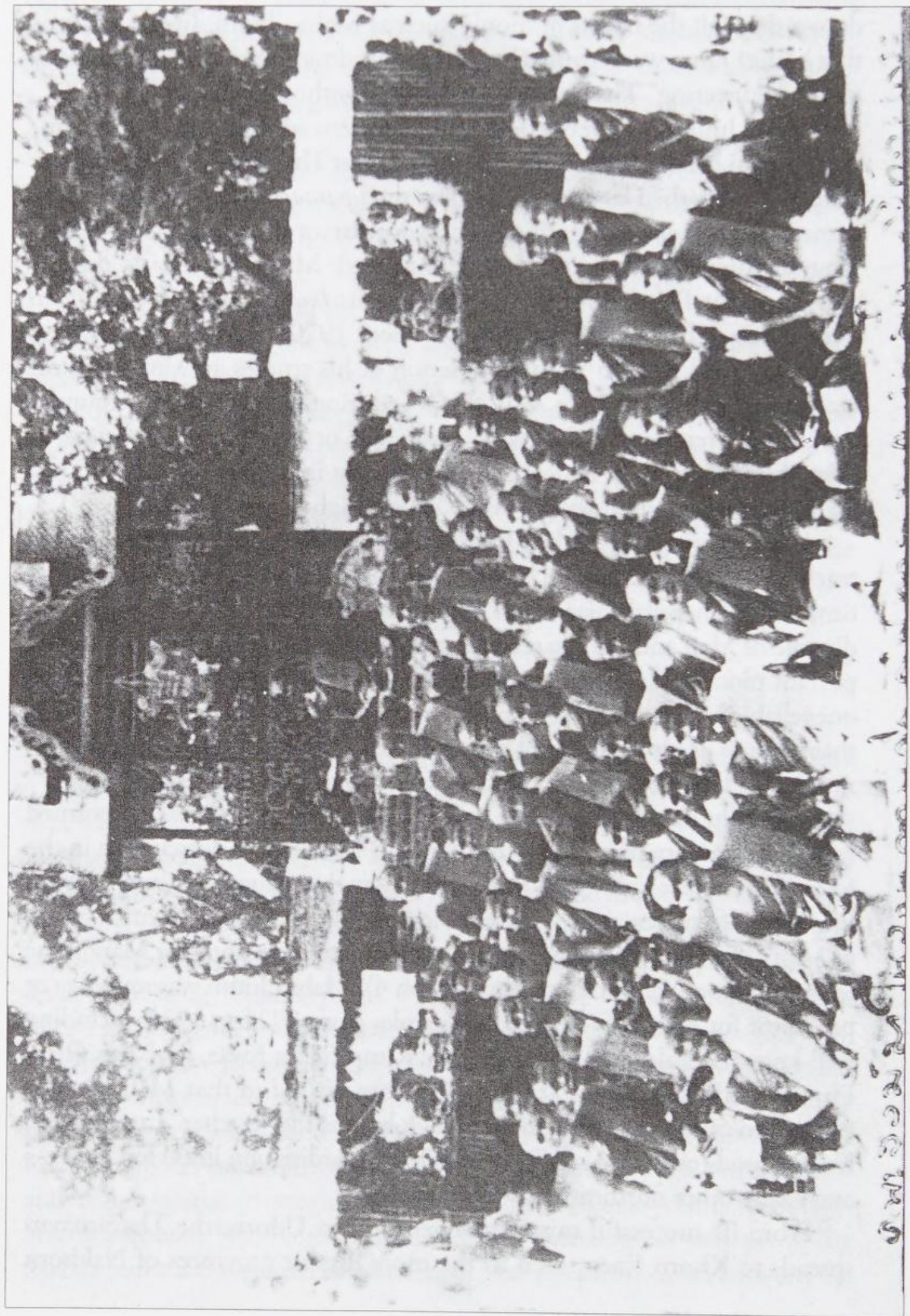
As a young novice Mahaa Juum had been introduced to Man and his teacher Ajaan Sao Kantasiilo at Wat Liap in Ubon by his own teacher at the time, Phra Thepsitthaajaan “Jan Khemiyo” (born in 1881, Jan was also a disciple of Man and, on the recommendation of Ajaan Sao, became an important pioneer Thammayut monk in Nakhorn Phanom).<sup>23</sup> According to one reliable informant, when Mahaa Juum first went to see Man, he was told that because of his particularly large ears (!) he would be a successful *pariyat* monk and that he should go to Bangkok and pursue his studies.

Mahaa Juum remained close to Man, especially after the latter returned from his luminary residence in the north in 1940 (see the discussion in the following chapter), although unable to follow the arduous *dhutanga* way of life. He is often seen at the centre of now-fading photographs with a group of Man’s forest monk-pupils and at the cremation ceremony for Man in the town of Sakon Nakhorn (see Photograph 4). Mahaa Juum was *upatchaa* or preceptor for many of Man’s early disciples from 1924 to 1933, including well-known monks such as Ajaans Orn, Kirng, Siilaa, Kwaa, Sim, Fan, Rian, Phrom, and Mahaa Bua. It should be borne in mind that Man was not entitled to carry out ordinations, though he was the “teacher” (*ajaan*) and lineage head (not to be confused with formal ordination lines) for these — and many other northeastern forest monks.

From its successful missionary ventures in Udorn, the Thammayut spreads to Khorn Kaen, then to the more distant provinces of Nakhorn



Ajaan Man's Funeral Ceremony, 13 January 1950, Wat Paa Sutthaawaat, Sakon Nakhorn





The photograph shows forty disciples — including some senior high-ranking monks (nine monks unidentified) who attended the funeral.

The following monks in this photograph have been identified, many the DRAMATIS PERSONAE mentioned in this book, as indicated by small capital letters:

SOMDET PHRA MAHAAWIRAWONG “PHIM THAMMATHARO”  
PHRA PHROMMUNII “PHIN SUWAJO”  
PHRA THAMMAJEDII “JUUM PHANTHULO”  
Phra Thepworakhun “Um”  
Phra Thepyaanaawisit “Toem”  
PHRA ARIYAKHUNAATHAAN “SENG PUSO”  
Phra Thamabundit  
PHRA YAANAWISIT “SING KHANTAYAAKHAMO” (AJAAN SING)  
Phra Raatchaphisaansuthi “Thong’in”  
LUANG PUU KHAO  
Phra Raatchasutthaajaan “Phromaa Chotiko”  
PHRA AJAAN THET  
PHRA AJAAN FAN  
PHRA AJAAN KWAA  
PHRA AJAAN MAHAA BUA  
Luang Phor Khunsak

Luang Phor Thorngsak  
PHRA KHRUU UDOMTHAMAKHUN “THORNGSUK SUJITTO”  
Phra Raatchakhunaaphon  
PHRA AJAAN BUNMAA  
PHRA AJAAN KONGMAA  
Phra Ajaan Uwan (Oun?)  
PHRA AJAAN SAAM  
PHRA RATANAACKONWISUT “DUUN ATULO” (LUANG PUU DUUN)  
Phra Ket Wannako  
PHRA SUTHAMKHANAAJAAN “DAENG” (AJAAN DAENG)  
Phra Khruu Panyaaworaaphon  
Phra Winaisunthornmethii  
PHRA AJAAN KUIJ  
Phra Khruu Wuthiworakhom “Phun”  
PHRA AJAAN ORNSAA



Phanom and Loei (Ariyakhunaathan 1933, pp. 58–65). By 1905 the principal outlying Thammayut monasteries were Wat Siitthep-pradit in Nakhorn Phanom (linked to Man's pupil mentioned above, Jan Khemiyo; also in the same province is another important monastery, Wat Aranyikaawaat, which claims Ajaan Sao as the first temporary abbot in 1917); Wat Phothisomphon in Udonthani; Wat Sii Meuang in Norngkhaai; Wat Siijan in *meuang* Khorn Kaen; Wat Sii Bunreung at Chonabot district in Khorn Kaen; Wat Sa'jan at Phon district in Khorn Kaen; Wat Sutthajindaa in Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa; and Wat Thaabor in Ubon (Toem 1970, pp. 654–58).

### THE THAMMAYUT AND THE EXTENSION OF EDUCATION REFORMS

There was no doubt that the underlying intention behind the expansion of the Siamese nation-state into the outlying provinces was hegemonic, as well as a need for militarily securing the frontier. As part of the state's unification programme, it carried with it the standardization of an expanded and distinctly Siamese education programme. King Chulalongkorn's European tour in 1897 had shown him the inadequacy of fundamental education in his own country (Wachirayaan 1971*b*, pp. 4–5) which, as we shall see, had direct implications for the new reformed *sangha*.

Shortly after Chulalongkorn's return from Europe, in 1898 significant changes were brought about in *sangha* affairs in an intensified effort to improve the educational programme in the provinces conforming to Bangkok standards. The Thammayut's provincial stem monasteries were to play a pivotal role in this programme. King Chulalongkorn had assigned the indefatigable Wachirayaan as "General Manager" and Damrong as his "Adviser" (*Phuubamrunghthupai*) to carry out this massive educational task (Wachirayaan 1971*b*, pp. 4–5).

Wachirayaan, who earlier criticized Damrong's Ministry of Public Instruction<sup>24</sup> for not improving the standards of monastic practice and education among the provincial *sangha* (Wyatt 1969, p. 248), had decided to set up his own team of nine high-ranking monks to supervise ten *monthon*. These *monthon* were Bangkok, Krungkhao, Nakhorn Sawan, Phitsanulok, Prajinburii, Janthaburii, Nakhorn Chaisii, Raatchaburii, Chumphon, and Phuket. Later, another four monks were added to Wachirayaan's team and another four *monthon* — Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa, Isaan, Nakhorn



Siithammaraat, and Buuraphaa. These were the thirteen (Wyatt [1969] mentions twelve, however) Education and Religion Directors (*Phuuamnuaikaan Kaanseuksaa*).

Each dry season the monk-directors were supposed to travel to their respective *monthon* (the *monthon* administrative system had been introduced just five years earlier by Damrong) and report back once a year at the capital (Wachirayaan 1971*b*, p. 22). In effect, these monks could obtain only limited information from village and outlying monasteries, and relied instead on provincial towns (Wyatt 1969, pp. 243–44). Travel up-country, as mentioned in the next chapter, was fraught with difficulties around this time.

The monk responsible for the original northeastern *monthon*, Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa (established in 1893/94), was Phra Thepmunii “Kaew”, who had formerly been abbot at Wat Prayuurawongsaawaat in Bangkok. For Monthon Isaan (established in 1910; see Tej Bunnag’s reckoning [1977, pp. 268–69]); the monk responsible was Phra Yaanarakhit, later to be known as Phra Ubaalii (Wachirayaan 1971*b*, p. 28).

The duties of the education monk-directors were to keep the central administration informed about conditions in their *monthon*, maintain statistical data on monasteries and their inmates as well as schools, advise local monks and the laity on how to establish new schools and to send promising monks and novices to the capital for Pali studies. These selected young monks would eventually be sent back home to teach (National Archives, *Seuksaathikaan*, Fifth Reign, 12/4, vol. 1). Wachirayaan had to devise specific guidelines for the monk-directors’ reports, as they were unsure as to what was specifically required of them. The format of the reports had to include details on conditions within the monastery, level of support from the local community, organization and structure at the monastery, behaviour of monastic inmates, number of new ordinands, teachers, level of interest in instructing villagers, number of monasteries in the sub-district with potential for establishing new schools, and so on (Wachirayaan 1971*c*, pp. 214–15).

From these duties it will seen that monks were to play a vital role in provincial education programmes, at least until the first decade of the twentieth century. As Keyes (1967*a*, p. 19) mentions, Chulalongkorn’s education reforms, replacing the traditional monk-dominated system, were the most important innovation making northeasterners conscious of their inclusion into the central Siamese polity.<sup>25</sup> But the new extension programme was not always to the liking of the local Mahaanikaai *sangha*, who found their *imperium* and local authority undermined.



Statistical information gathered by the monk-directors on the number of monasteries and inmates from the various *monthon* tended to be somewhat unreliable, as discussed below. Interestingly, Ubaalii, in one of his reports to Wachirayaan, mentions that in Ubon there was an exceptionally high proportion of novices to monks and, perhaps somewhat unusually, few *sit wat* or *dek wat* ("monastery boys") (Wachirayaan 1971c, p. 112). The high number of novices in Ubon may be due to the emergent educational opportunities in Monthon Isaan.

In 1899, throughout the country, there were reported to be 2,473 monasteries, 15,194 monks, 1,177 novices, and 15,803 *dek wat*. Yet only a year later, these figures had more than doubled: 6,830 monasteries, 59,087 monks, 18,697 novices, and 43,337 *dek wat* from all *monthon* (National Archives, *Seuksaathikaan*, Fifth Reign, 12/4, vol. 1). Up until the beginning of the twentieth century it is difficult to ascertain the number of Thammayut monks and monasteries in the northeast, but there could not have been many (Wyatt 1969, p. 244 n.; Keyes 1987, p. 140). This may be due to both local resistance and the tedious process of establishing new monasteries, factors which will become clearer in the following chapter. Keyes (1967b) mentions that later in the 1960s there was an average of one Thammayut monastery for each province, which may be true for important *meuang* centres, but may not take into consideration forest *samnak*.

The monk-directors wielded considerable authority and could in certain circumstances act as *monthon* religious heads (Wachirayaan 1971b, p. 4). By 1900 they were expected to establish models for efficient administration for the various provincial monastic heads (Jao Khana Jangwat). Essentially, they were catalysts for bringing about ecclesiastical change in the countryside (Wyatt 1969, p. 245) and had proposed a streamlined administration linking the periphery to the capital (*ibid.*, p. 247).

An early report from Ubaalii, shortly before he resigned his position at Monthon Isaan, mentions that the behaviour of the uneducated rural *sangha* (*Phrasongbaan-paameuangdorn*), lacking effective leadership, was unsatisfactory. He also mentions that the people, as in times past, preferred "popular" religious practices which he found did not conform to doctrinal tradition (Wachirayaan 1971c, p. 79). For example, it was noted that villages still preferred to spend their time listening to the *Mahaachaat* tale<sup>26</sup> conducive to bringing merit to the listener, rather than in the more pragmatic and "normative" aspects of the religion. Mongkut had some time earlier also criticized this popular religious ritual saying that it had no practical value. As he



bluntly put it, “how can merit accrue from holding farcical recitations of the Maha Ch’at? In my opinion, the money collected for such a purpose would be better employed in buying fuel to burn dead dogs’ carcasses with” (Gerini 1976, p. 61). This reflects the attitude of reformers to traditional beliefs and practices which do not accord with doctrinal interpretations. The *Jataka* are not regarded among ascetic northeastern monks — unlike their Sinhalese forest-dwelling brethren (Carrithers 1983, p. 139) — as a significant source of inspiration in teaching or day-to-day monastic life; though all forest monks would be aware of the Vessantara Jataka’s influence on popular teaching.<sup>27</sup>

In Ubaalii’s report to Wachirayaan he also mentions that despite many minor faults, “serious breaches” in the *sangha* were few (National Archives, *Seuksaathikaan*, Fifth Reign, 12/58). At the conclusion of every annual meeting, Wachirayaan was supposed to provide a summary report to the king. It often took up to two years for reports to reach the king, from the time they were first written. In one report of 1900 he mentions in vague terms mistakes made by monk-directors over the nomination of provincial monks for Jao Khana positions. He also mentions severe budget restraints hindering the performance of the many up-country tasks. Three monk-directors were castigated for inadequate performance of their duties, including Ubaalii, who by this time had in any case decided to resign.

Ironically, despite criticisms, Wachirayaan acknowledged the difficulties facing these monks in carrying out their tasks. He also mentions that there was some confusion over place-names (many similar) as well as time limitation (a great deal of time spent in travelling) and misunderstandings occurring in communications. Wachirayaan, in one report to the king, alludes to the huge amount of work in these up-country tasks. He was not alone as Damrong, under immense pressure himself, indicated that he may not be able to carry out his work as effectively as he wished (National Archives, *Seuksaathikaan*, Fifth Reign, 12/8, vol. 1).

#### CENTRALIZATION AND TENSIONS IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

The Thammayut, with its tight network sourced in Bangkok, was starting to make inroads into the Northeastern Region because of the combined efforts of high-ranking *pariyat* northeastern monks together with the support of local-based Siamese administrators. These northeastern scholar-monks would make use of Man’s pupillary network to facilitate the establishment of forest *samnak* which, as I intend to show, in many cases



evolve into conventional Thammayut monasteries. In fact the efforts of the Thammayut's missionary scholar-monks would not have been possible, given local resentment, without the backing of the Bangkok-appointed civil officials in northeastern *monthon*.

Vickery (1970) and Tej Bunnag (1977) have shown that there was an almost total exclusion of traditional local élite in positions of high office in the new reform bureaucracy. In comparison with the north and the south where regional sentiments were to some extent taken into account, the northeastern provinces were integrated into a direct mode of control within the *monthon* system without any preparations beforehand to "mitigate the effects of change". Local *meuang* élite were replaced within a few years by the new administrative "commissioners" (*khaaluang*) from the capital (Vickery 1970, p. 880). But as Toem mentions, historical conditions in the northeast necessitated different pragmatic considerations. Before the reforms, the Thai-Lao *meuang* had their own bases of local authority, and Luang Prabang and Wiengjan their own kings (Phra Jao). Before the new administrative structure of 1890, the many quasi-independent, "semi-feudalistic" (*latthi yaek-amnaat*) *meuang* were situated at the most four nights' travel away from each other. The *meuang* were categorized into four divisions (*ek, tho, trii, and Jattawaa*) (ibid., pp. 387–89), though eventually regrouped.

The outcome of the administrative structural changes initiated by Chulalongkorn in the northeast was the irreversible down-grading of the local élite. Keyes (1977a) summarized these initiatives commencing with the *Thetsaphibaan* as an ambitious regrouping and redefining of territorial units in which the population was administratively organized. With the implementation of the 1894 "Edict Concerning Local Administration" only a few of the old *meuang* were recognized as provinces (*jangwat*), most were formed into districts (*amphoe*) under the provinces, with many demoted to the status of "sub-districts" (*tambon*). Simultaneously, the traditional northeastern élite were effectively down-graded among the many fragmented small *meuang*. Even those few who were incorporated into the new administration had little real power, now in the hands of the Siamese royal administrators or *Khaaluang* placed over them (ibid., p. 294).

The new Siamese administrators (civil and *sangha*) displayed noticeable contempt for the indigenous *sangha* (see Ubaalii's report to Wachirayaan mentioned above). At the same time, as one monastic informant<sup>28</sup> told me, the civil administrators must have offered considerable support and attention (*dai rap khwaam sonjai*) to the pioneering Thammayut monks, contributing



to local resentment against the reform movement.

As mentioned earlier, in the case of Monthon Isaan formal backing and support for the expansionary Thammayut monasteries came from the king's powerful civil representatives (Khaaluangtaangphra-ong) and lesser officials appointed from the capital. The reform movement depended significantly on this patronage to gain a foothold in traditional Mahaanikaai territory. Because educational and administrative reforms involved both the Thammayut and the civil administrators, reform monks were seen as part of the same hegemonic process of domestication over Lao-speaking lands. Yet these particular reform monks, in contrast to the new civil administrators, were themselves northeasterners, educated in the Siamese capital. As mentioned in a later chapter, for the ambitious provincial boys, the *sangha* was the most accessible means to attain social mobility in the new Siamese bureaucracy. Through studying Thai and Pali at Thammayut monasteries, securing the patronage and support of high-ranking kin or through a non-related benefactor, a northeastern village boy could earn similar prestige as the Siamese civil administrative élite.

Originally, most Thammayut monasteries were established either by the royalty or affiliated Bangkok élite and many of its leading monks selected from a core group of favoured royal disciples (Tambiah 1984, p. 166). The nomination of the royalty to positions of Phra Raachaakhana rank first occurred during the Second Reign (1809–24) with the appointment of Krom Somdet Phra Paramaanuchit-chinorot, the Phra Sangkharaat from 1851 to 1853 (Damrong 1970, p. 46). A Fifth Reign document (National Archives, *Seuksaathikaan*, 8/19, 1–19) provides a listing of high-ranking Phra Raachaakhana monks in the Thammayut, starting with royal monks Mongkut, Pawaret, and Wachirayaan (all mentioned earlier). There are also another eight royal monks, six of these Mom Jao (princes or grandchildren of royalty) and two of Mom Raachaawong status (great grandchildren of royalty). This document covers the period from the inception of the Thammayut until 1913. From the total listing of 106 monks, three had direct connections with the northeast and Phra Kammathaan forest monk-disciples of Man. These monks were the above-mentioned Tisso, Ubaalii (then Phra Raatchakawii), and Ariyakawii “Orn”. All were listed as being connected with the Thammayut's first monastery in Ubon, Wat Supatanaaraam.

Relationships between the Thammayut and Mahaanikaai up-country were not positive as the northeastern *sangha* as a whole was administered



largely by the Thammayut. In 1902 fourteen *monthon* heads (Jao Khana Monthon) were appointed, only five of whom were Mahaanikaai. Local senior Mahaanikaai monks were understandably upset by this inequitable situation, especially as in many cases they were more qualified in terms of monastic seniority (*phansaa*) (Khaneungnit 1985, pp. 37–39). Tisso mentions in his *Tamnaa Wat Supatanaaraam* (n.d.) of hostilities between monks at his monastery (Wat Supat) and those of the Mahaanikaai's Wat Paa Noi. When the two lines of monks passed each other on morning alms, after the front senior monks had passed, the rest of the line consisting of junior monks and novices would sometimes brawl. To make matters worse, many Thammayut monks may have shown their haughty disdain and superiority towards their Mahaanikaai brethren, as Wachirayaan observes, though he adds that he personally did not “disparage all Mahanikaya monks as did most Dhammayut monks” (C. Reynolds 1979, p. 5).

The head of the Mahaanikaai in Udornthaanii (Phra Udomthamakhaamii, Wat Matchimaawaat) told me that in the days of Man, the Thammayut monks were “arrogant” (*uwatdii*), and that antagonism centred primarily around the cross-cutting of “theory” and “practice” which the Thammayut claimed superiority on both counts. Phra Udomthamakhaamii said he met Man once when the wanderer gave a sermon for villagers at a primary school in nearby Baan Norng Namkhem, but added that he was not impressed because he did not “chant” in the established manner before giving his sermon (except for the standard preliminary homage *nammo tassa*), nor did he seem to have much knowledge of canonical texts. This reflects the prevailing attitude by scholastic monks (of either *nikaai*) towards their less learned brethren, an issue which I shall return to in later chapters.

\* \* \* \* \*

The interplay between the state, controlled through the new streamlined bureaucracy, and the far provinces should by now be appreciated. The expansion of the state was facilitated by wandering forest monks in the reform “sect” (Thammayut-tika Nikaai). In fact as part of the same particular dialectical process, Man's lineage to a large extent was a direct product of the ecclesiastical reforms (Keyes 1987, p. 141). Rapid changes were taking place in the countryside, new alliances and patronages formed as Thai-Lao villages were integrated into the Siamese nation-state, and northeastern Thammayut forest monks found themselves precursors for the Siamese institutions,



directly or indirectly. Forest monks were, after all, linked to the centre through their ordination lines, senior monks as patrons based at Bangkok monasteries and in some cases connections through higher religious studies in the capital.

With this social, political, and historical scenario, the following chapter will look closely at some of the specific implications of the reform movement for the peripatetic northeastern forest monks.

## NOTES

1. The *Vinaya* (*Sattavibhanga*) clearly mentions forest, the habitat of the ascetic meditator, as all surrounding countryside “except for the village and its precincts”. The delineation of the precincts is important to distinguish abodes of forest monks from village-dwelling monks. Forest abodes are thus specified as being “five hundred bow-lengths” (or *dhanus*, see Upasak [1975, p. 30]) distant from the village (about 1 kilometre; see Khantipalo [1979, p. 111] and Griswold and Prasert [1973, p. 119]) (*Visuddhimagga* [Buddhaghosa 1975, p. 72]).
2. For secondary sources on Mongkut and his monastic life, see, for instance, Blofeld (1987), Wyatt (1969), Moffat (1961), Griswold (1957), Thompson (1941), Lingat (1933), Butt (1978), Kirsch (1978), and C. Reynolds (1972).

During Man’s monastic life the Thammayut was headed by Wachirayaan (1892–1921) followed by Wachirayaanawong (1921–58), both related to Mongkut. Positions of Sangkharaat since the time of Mongkut until Man’s death are listed below (conflicting dates from a biographical cremation volume for Phra Sangkharaat “Waat Waasano” 1988 are enclosed within angular brackets). It should be noted that six out of the seven are Thammayut and five (three from Wat Bowornniwet) of royal descent (denoted by an asterisk).

Seventh/Ratanakosin:	Paramaanuchit-chinorot (Wat Phrachetuphon)* 1851 <1850>–1853
Eighth	Pawaretwiriyaalongkorn (Wat Bowornniwet)* 1891 <1853>–1892
Ninth	Pusso Saa (Wat Raatchapradit) 1893–98 <1899>
Tenth	Wachirayaan (Wat Bowornniwet)* 1910 <1899>–1921



Eleventh	Chinawornsiriwat (Wat Raatchabophit)* 1926 <1921>–1937
Twelfth	Tissathewo “Phae” (Wat Suthat) 1938–44
Thirteenth	Wachirayaanawong (Wat Bowornniwet)* 1945–58

See Praphat Trinarong (1964) and Wichian and Sunthorn (1985) for details on the various Sangkharaat of the Ratanakosin period.

From the time of Paramaanuchit-chinorot’s death in 1853 (the first prince appointed as Sangkharaat) the position was vacant until the end of Mongkut’s reign. This was in order to avoid sectarian disputes (Kyaw 1984, pp. 182–83). King Chulalongkorn then made Pawaret, his own teacher, the next Sangkharaat followed after his death by Saa (wat Raatchapradit). However, Lingat (1933, p. 100) tells us that the appointment of Saa had been “merely honorary” and the effective head of the Thai *sangha* was Wachirayaan.

Professor Chalong Soontravanich (Department of History, Chulalongkorn University) described (personal communication) Saa as one of the most colourful Sangkharaat in recent history. He was close to Mongkut and was the only monk to have been awarded the highest *perian* Grade Nine twice. When he originally passed the examination for the *perian* Wang Naa (Front Palace) during the Third Reign, he was only fourteen years of age. Saa apparently disrobed (much to the concern of the king) after Mongkut came to the throne to pursue an outside career. It was after this that Mongkut announced his well-known edict cautioning scholar monks seeking careers in the civil bureaucracy. Saa eventually reordained at Wat Bowornniwet and sat the ecclesiastical examinations again, passing the formidable highest grade at one stroke. He was then offered abbotship at the prestigious Wat Raatchapradit (Mongkut’s personal monastery). His other responsibilities included Rong Jao Khana Faai Tai, Jao Khana Yai Faai Nuer and he was given the rank Somdet Ariyawongsaakhotayaan and then the position Somdet Phra Sangkharaat (National Archives, *Seuksaathikaan*, Fifth Reign, 8/19, 1–19). After Saa’s death the position was once again vacant (Sobhana 1967).

3. See Mongkut’s Royal Proclamations on laxity among the Thai *sangha*, in *Prachum Prakaat Raatchakaan Thii Sii* [Collected proclamations of the Fourth Reign], [1960–61, pp. 130, 250, 257, and 296].
4. Placzek (1981, p. 169), in an anachronistic *faux pas* mentions that Mongkut supported Man, though Man was born three years after Mongkut’s death.

Mongkut never had much sympathy for regional variants to the “Thai”



tradition judging by his attitude to traditional northeastern *Morlam* singing and playing. Performance of *Morlam* was banned from the capital in an 1865 proclamation because of its “alien” destructive influence on traditional Siamese genres. In a superstitious vein, he also suggested that its performance would affect the rainfall and had accounted for poor rice yields (Raikes 1988, pp. 21–22).

5. *Phra Kammathan* (Lokthip publication), n.d., vol. 2, pp. 200–1.
  6. The murals at Wat Somanat are considered somewhat earlier (Fourth Reign) than similar ones showing the *dhutanga* practices in the Phra Sasada Vihara at Wat Bowornniwet. The latter paintings are to be found on panels between the windows and doors, divided into three sections (it is not easy to get access to the Phra Sasada Vihara as it is normally kept locked; see reference in *Wat Bovoronives Vihara* [1972, pp. 43–44]).
  7. There were other Thammayut monasteries of importance emerging in the first decade of the twentieth century in metropolitan Bangkok. These were Wat Raachaathiwaat, Raatchapradit, Bupphaaraam, Mongkutkasat, Khreuawan (Thonburii), Raatchabophit, Phichaiyaat (Thonburii), Senaasanaaraam, Somkhang, Pathumwanaaraam, and Samphanthawong (National Archives, *Seuksaathikaan*, Fifth Reign, 8/19, 1–19).
- Thammayut monasteries consisting predominantly of northeastern monks (Wat Isaan) where some of Man’s pupils stayed from time to time were Wat Noranaat, Wat Boromniwaat, Wat Samphonthawong, Wat Sapathum, and Wat Phrasiimahaathaat. Some of these monasteries are mentioned in this chapter.
8. See, for instance, C. Reynolds (1979, pp. 43–44).
  9. Tisso (1936, p. 23); Toem (1970, pp. 613–14).
  10. Although Ariyakhunaathan (1933) with slight variation mentions only the royal monk named Jao Phanthula (presumably Phanthulo Dii) sent by Mongkut to establish the first Thammayut monastery (mentioned as Wat Siithong).
  11. Tisso (1936, p. 19); Phra Ubaalii’s autobiography (1983); Toem (1970, pp. 616–17); Ariyakhunaathan (1933, p. 50).
  12. Personal conversation with Jao Khun Wijitthammaphaanii, present abbot of Wat Supat, May 1988. The monastery was eventually up-graded to “Royal Monastery” (*Worawihaan*) in 1935.
  13. Ariyakhunaathan (1933, p. 50); Toem (1970, p. 620).
  14. Phra Phothiyanwichai (1959). I am grateful to Professor Chalongsornvanich, Department of History, Chulalongkorn University for first pointing out the existence of this manuscript.



15. For a brief discussion on sectional classifications in the 1902 Sangha Act, see Somboon (1982, p. 31) and Ishii (1986, pp. 69–71). The ecclesiastical structure in modern times is based on an earlier model and has Jao Khana (sectional head) for the province, district, and sub-district (*tambon*) in the country's seventy-three provinces. These provinces are in turn grouped into eighteen ecclesiastical regions under a respective Jao Khana Phaak (Sangha Regional Governor). The eighteen regions are again grouped into five primary administrative areas each supervised by a Jao Khana Yai (Sangha General Governor), namely, the central, north, east, south, and Thammayut in a separate category.
16. Monthon Isaan had fourteen *meuang* ("domain" or defined urban-centred areas), divided into four provinces headed in the ecclesiastical domain by six monks of Phra Raachaakhana rank (highest general category). The four provinces were Ubon, Saket, Mahaasaarakhaam, and Nakhorn Jampaasak. Ubon had three *meuang* (Ubon, Yasothon, and Khemaraat) with a total of eighteen districts. Saket had four *meuang* (Saket, Khukhan — the old name of Siisaket, Sangkha, and Surin) with eighteen districts. Mahaasaarakhaam had five *meuang* (Suwannaphuum, Roi Et, Kaalasin, Mahaasaarakhaam, and Kamalaasai) with twenty-five districts. Nakhorn Jampaasak had two *meuang* (Nakhorn Jampaasak and Det Udom) with fifteen districts (National Archives, *Seuksaathikaan*, Fifth Reign, 12/58, vol. 6).

The following is a list of high-ranking Isaan monks in R.S. (the era dating from the founding of Bangkok) 120 [1901]:

- Meuang Ubon, Phra Ariyakawii "Orn" (mentioned above in text), Jao Khana Yai;
- Meuang Yasothon, Phra Khruu Wijitsothanaajaan, Jao Khana Yai, Phra Khruu Yaanawisuthikhun, Jao Khana Rong (deputy head);
- Meuang Khukhan, Phra Khruu Thammajindaa-mahaa-munii-khotamawong, Jao Khana Yai, Phra Khruu Thewaraat-kawiiwong-worajaan, Jao Khana Rong;
- Meuang Surin, Phra Khruu Wimonsilaphrot, Jao Khana Yai;
- Meuang Suwannaphuum, Phra Khruu Suwannaphuum, Jao Khana Yai;
- Meuang Roi Et, Phra Khruu Adunsilaphrot, Jao Khana Rong;
- Meuang Nakhorn Jampaasak, under the Jao Khana Yai in Ubon.

These above-mentioned monks all come under the direction of the Jao Khana Monthon Isaan, although at this time no one was officially appointed to this position and the most senior monk was the above-mentioned Jao Khana Yai for Ubon, Phra Ariyakawii "Orn" (it should be remembered that Ubon was



of course the centre for the reforms).

1901 statistics for Monthon Isaan indicate that there were 2,060 monasteries, 11,718 monks, 15,847 novices, and 837 monastery boys. It is not surprising that there were seemingly a high number of monastic inmates as educational opportunities through reform monasteries were opening up at this time (see later in the text).

17. Orn had a total of thirty-seven *phansaa* and an impressive monastic career. See, for instance, mention in National Archives, *Seuksaathikaan*, Fifth Reign (8/19 [1–19]) and *Phra Kammathaan* (n.d., vol. 2, p. 229).
18. For an analysis of the provincial reforms that took place during the period of Sanphasitthiprasong, see Phaithuun (1972). Keyes (1977*a*, p. 292 n.) regards this work as the best secondary source on the period covering the millennial uprising in the northeast. Sanphasitthiprasong's apparent heavy-handed policy implementation (for example, the head tax) may not have endeared him to the local Isaan population and certainly may have exacerbated already-simmering peasant discontent. Tej Bunnag (1977) vaguely portrays Sanphasitthiprasong as an even-handed but strong administrator having proven himself earlier as "High Commissioner" for Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa, implementing a "prototype" village administrative structure (*ibid.*, p. 68).
19. Toem is an indispensable source of information on this period; a "basic source", as Keyes (1979, p. 129) says.
20. Forbes (1988, p. 135) says that the first official Siamese military force against the Hor was sent across the Maekhong a year later than this date, in 1875.
21. An officially unregistered monastery, hereafter *samnak*; see endnote 20, Chapter Four.
22. Ubaalii had many high-ranking pupils of Phra Raachaakhana rank including Tisso, who went on to become Somdet (discussed later in the text); Phra Saasanadilok "Saen" (a personal favourite of Wachiraawut), the Jao Khana Monthon Udorn around that time; Phra Panyaaphisaanthen "Nuu", Wat Pathuwanaaraam (mentioned later); Phra Raachamunii "Sii", Wat Niwet; Phra Methaathammarot "Sao", Wat Pichaiyaat; and Phra Amaaraaphinakkhit "Chai", Wat Bowornniwet. There were also a number of Phra Khruu ranking monks who claimed Ubaalii as their teacher.

Some details on Ubaalii used in this dissertation came from a monk claiming to be his only living disciple, Roi Et born Phra Thep-panyaamunii "Buu", current abbot of Ubaalii's old monastery, Wat Boromniwaat, Bangkok.

23. *Phanthulaaphibuuchaa* (1963, p. 2); Thet (1978, pp. 180–81). The remains of Mahaa Juum (Phra Thammajedii) are presently being kept in the *kuti* of the abbot of Wat Phothisomphon, Phra Thepmetthaajaan, a personal friend and



one-time *pariyat* associate in Chiang Mai of Mahaa Bua. A *Jediiphiphithaphan* (relic and personal requisite museum) at the time of writing is being built for Phra Thammajedii (though his remains were not crystallized “relics”). This was apparently in accordance with his wish before he died.

24. The Ministry or “department” of Public Instruction operated between 1887 and 1889 and played an important role in the formation of the Ministry of Interior (Riggs 1967, pp. 116–17).

Between 1902 and 1909, the Ministry of Education took over from the *sangha* responsibility for extending education to the provinces. New positions “Education Commissioners” (Thammakaan Monthon) were created to supervise both elementary and secondary education (Tej Bunnag 1977, p. 180).

25. See also Wyatt (1966*a*), Landon (1940, p. 131), and Zack (1977).
26. The *Vessantara Jataka*, the popular tale of the Buddha’s existence before his last life. In the northeast this takes place at the *Bun Phrawet* ceremony around February to March; see, for example, Tambiah (1970, pp. 160 ff.).
27. Though Dr Paul Cohen (School of Behavioural Sciences, Macquarie University, Sydney) informs me that the *Vessantara Jataka* has remained an important frame of reference and active ideology in the northern Thai (*Ton Bun*) tradition. They were certainly a formative influence on the likes of northern charismatic activists such as Phor Pan (see Cohen [1984, pp. 204–5]). As well, Pranee (1989) has cogently shown the traditional and contemporary significance of the *Jataka* in cultural contextualization among the rural Laopuan in eastern Thailand.

In at least one recorded sermon (Man Phuurithatto 1987, *Muttothai*, pp. 7–8) Man refers to the *Vessantara* (*Wessandornchaat*) as to basic human ideals worthy of emulating: namely, “giving”, “maintaining precepts”, and “developing the mind”, leading the aspirant on to *nipphaan*.

28. Jao Khun Wijit, Wat Supatanaaraam, Ubon.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### *The Wandering Master and Ramified Monastic Settlements*

I am certain that he was devoid of defilements ... He himself never said that he was ... [also] he never said that he was an arahant or anything, but he would say it in his ability to explain the true Dhamma on every level in a way that would go straight to the heart ... This is why I can dare to say unabashedly that the Venerable Acariya Mun [Man] Bhuridatta [Phuurithatta] Thera is one of the important arahants of our day and age ... which is an age in which arahants are exceedingly rare. (Ajaan Mahaa Bua 1987*a*, p. 52)

Ajaan Man Phuurithatto, founder of the modern *kammathan* forest tradition, was born in 1870 at Khambong village, a small farming settlement situated near the Lao border in Khongjiam district, Ubon Raatchathani. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Ubon was the centre for the newly introduced reform *nikaai* and many of its pioneering northeastern monks came from this province. It is perhaps no mere coincidence that Man's ascetic monastic career was made possible by his early formative period with high-ranking Ubon-born northeastern *pariyat* monks (his preceptor [*upatchaa*] was the famous Thammayut monk, Phra Ariyakawii "Orn", mentioned in Chapter Three). Wat Liap, where his first meditation teacher Ajaan Sao Kantasiilo<sup>1</sup> came from, was at that time situated on the outskirts of the town of Ubon.

Man's father was named Naai Khamduang, his mother Naang Jan, and he was the eldest of eight brothers and sisters of whom only two were still alive on the day of his funeral ceremony in 1950. There is very little information available on Man's boyhood life, except that he liked to partici-



pate in traditional folk opera (*Morlam*) when a troupe occasionally came to his village. On one occasion his biographer tells us, Jan (Phra Ubaalii), who was a little older than Man and his childhood friend, came to his rescue as he was losing in a verbal exchange with a local girl (Mahaa Bua 1982, pp. 165–66). *Morlam* is a contest in improvised rhyming, frequently enacting male-female conflicts in which a battle of wits can become quite febrile and excitable. In *Morlam* much use is made of word play, riddles, puns, innuendoes, and the use of metaphors. One informant suggested that the rhetorical style which Man developed in *Morlam* was carried over in his mode of teaching. He would often instruct his pupils in extemporaneous puns and rhymes, an old Thai-Lao discursive style rarely heard today and indicative of a sharp and subtle mind. As Phra Thanissaro (Man 1988) says, the “indirectness of such a style could make it very suggestive, giving it a direct impact on a subliminal level”. A perceptive disciple could learn “a number of useful lessons on a number of levels from a single statement”. Man tended to be terse and direct at times and never wasted words.

Man first ordained as a novice when he was fifteen years of age at Wat Baan Khambong, his home village. During this time he was able to study elementary Pali and memorize various *sutta* from local teaching monks. After two years he disrobed for personal reasons (unspecified by his biographers), but decided to undertake *bhikkhu* ordination four years later, on 22 June 1892 at Wat Siithong (now Wat Sii Ubon) in Ubon, encouraged by his mother. Man’s principal biographer Mahaa Bua, however, mentions that he ordained at Wat Liap, but this is unlikely as Man’s *upatchaa*, Phra Ariyakawii “Orn”, was at Wat Siithong, one of the Thammayut’s main monasteries in Ubon at the time. Wat Siithong was also a favoured place for performing higher ordinations in the town. Shortly after ordination Man went to the small, relatively insignificant peri-urban Wat Liap to study *wipatsanaa* meditation under its head, Ajaan Sao, whose reputation at this time was already well established in much of the northeast.

A monk named Phra Khruu Siithaa Chaiyaseno (or in one source, Chaiyathammo) had been Man’s *Kamawaajaan* (Pali: *Kammavacacariya* or “Act-Announcing Teacher” in the ordination ceremony) and was also *upatchaa* in Ubon during the first decade of the twentieth century. A number of senior monastic informants in Ubon told me that Siithaa was Man’s (and Sao’s before him) first “teacher”, an important local figure at both Wat Siithong and especially another nearby early Thammayut monastery, Wat Buuraphaa. This monastery, deserted for many years and now neglected but



with the original elevated wooden *kuti* (monk's dwelling) still intact, is presently occupied by a handful of town monks. Siithaa, considered both a scholar and practice monk, spent time in Bangkok — as did many turn-of-the-century northeastern *pariyat* monks — furthering his studies as a prerequisite for administrative duties in Ubon. When Siithaa died, Man went to stay for a brief period at Wat Buuraphaa (it is not known in what capacity). A fading photograph of Siithaa at Wat Buuraphaa taken in 1921 seems to be the only one available of this monk. According to the present abbot of Wat Supatanaaraam in Ubon, Jao Khun Wijit, Siithaa died some time before Sao (that is, before 1941).

Shortly after his ordination, as mentioned above, Man went off with Sao to practise meditation in the *dhutanga* tradition (Yaanasiri et al. 1977, p. 16). However, after a while he found he was getting nowhere until his famed dream experience or *nimit*, rich in normative symbolism, which gave him the assurance that if he persisted in his efforts he would attain *arahān'ship* in this lifetime. Never faltering in this primary imagery, Ajaan Man went on to become the very stuff of popular hagiography, attaining *arahān'ship* (or, as expressed in the text, defeating the “monarch of the cycles of birth and death”, *jakrapatdiraawattajak*) while staying in the mountains of Chiang Mai province.

Thet (1978, p. 78), an early pupil of Man, still living at the time of writing, describes his teacher's “twin mission” as wandering in search of suitable places for meditation in order to “win release from *samsara*” and in teaching *dhamma*. Man, by all accounts, was reported to have been fierce, yet on occasions compassionate, towards his disciples and possessed immense charisma, energy, and confidence in the practice and the ascetic tradition which he espoused. Phra Thanissaro (in Lii n.d. [a]) suggests that Man's distinctiveness lay in his teaching emphasis on persistent meditation and “total re-education” of disciples, that is, their “habits, values, and powers of observation”. Lii, supposedly the first northeastern pupil to bring Man's teachings into central Thai society, describes his relationship with Man as follows:

Ajaan Mun [Man] was very good for me, but also very hard. I had to be willing to learn everything anew ... Somedays he'd be cross with me, saying that I was messy, that I never put anything in the right place ... but he would never tell me what the right places were ... To be able to stay with him for any length of time, you had to be very observant, and very circumspect. You couldn't make a sound when you walked, you couldn't



leave footprints on the floor, you couldn't make noise when you swallowed water, or when you opened the windows or doors. There had to be a science to everything you did ... hanging out robes ... arranging bedding, everything. Otherwise he'd drive you out, even in the middle of the Rains Retreat. Even then, you'd just have to take it, and try to use your powers of observation [bare attention with mindfulness]. (Li n.d. [b], pp. 21–22; [a], pp. 6–7)

Essentially, Man's career, with its significant impact on Thai religion, has four phases:<sup>2</sup> the first (1892–1915), a meeting with Sao and extensive wanderings throughout the northeast, after a while going off by himself (towards the end of this phase he makes his first visit to the capital); the second phase (1916–28), a consolidating stage, lineage formation at various impact points in the northeast (discussed later) and the start of settled forest *samnak*,<sup>3</sup> the third phase (1929–40), temporary residence in the mountains around Chiang Mai; finally a fourth phase (1940–49), return to the northeast and meeting with former pupils, last five years in the forest in Sakon Nakhorn province and preparation for his imminent decease at Wat Paa Sutthaawaat in the town of Sakon Nakhorn.

Man did not simply live and die in anonymity, as a wandering monk with exemplary distaste of urban centres, the state, and its ecclesiastical bureaucracy. In the latter part of his life he became emblematic of doctrinal reform in its most radical expression. The “practice” vocation had been held in disrepute since Mongkut's open castigation of apotropaic, mystical, and non-normative practices associated with forest monks (at least those forest monks which Mongkut observed wandering around the outskirts of the capital). Man, largely through the efforts of his dedicated disciples and supporters, brought forest monks into the centrepiece of classic orthodoxy, if (and by necessity) existing on the rim of social forms.

The reputations of Man and his disciples were established firstly in the far provinces, based on “purity” and at the level of praxis in the application of the *winai* and *dhutanga*. These monks taught through the local idiom in a concrete, personal, “imagist”, discursive mode. But besides villagers, forest monks found their most dedicated supporters from local bureaucrats and Thai-Chinese traders (I shall return to this in a later chapter). As an off-spin of the ascetic meditative regimen, they were also considered to possess supernatural powers and abilities (*aphinihaan* or *aphinyaa*; Pali: *abhiñña*). In this there is a multiplier effect through transmission as stories and claims about the teacher are circulated and endorsed by his close pupils.

It was not in the countryside, however, but at the religio-political centre



where certain forest monks were institutionalized, their local reputations sanctioned by key supporters in the capital. In the countryside with the eclectic tradition of “popular” Buddhism, villagers have never been far from the mystical aspects of their religion. Forest monks, meritorious charismatic leaders (*phuumiibun*), and wandering hermits (*ruesii*) were but one step from the village. Man was typical of religious mystics or virtuosi in one sense, but as an orthodox practitioner of normative Buddhism (in the Thammayut ratified and sourced from the centre) at the same time remained distant from popular religiosity and rarely, if ever, stayed at village monasteries (*contra* Tambiah [1984, p. 134; 1987*a*, p. 119]). However, neither did Man stay long in Bangkok or urban centres where most of his core lay disciples came from. In maintaining some contact for daily supports with villagers and tribal people at the interstices and periphery of the country, it was at no concession to his eremitic ideals.

I wish to underscore that whilst there have been many wandering ascetics over the centuries and during the time of Man, the latter was a properly ordained reform Thammayut monk, which enabled his lineage to take institutional root and to be eventually recognized as exemplary and perfectly “orthodox” (from here it was a short discursive step to nationally acclaimed *arahān*). This point is stressed by Keyes, who says that the kind of forest monk

who adheres to a strict ascetic version of the discipline and who cultivates the practice of meditation is a type which first appears within the Thammayut order. (1987, p. 141)

However, I do not agree with Keyes (*ibid.*, p. 136) that this necessarily discounts the possibility of there being ascetic monks claiming orthodoxy and orthopraxy prior to the nineteenth century reforms. In fact one cannot discount certain continuities. Man, we can say, was a regional manifestation of certain universal *arahān* ideals, within the matrix of particular historical conditions sourced in the reforms (Tambiah 1987*b*, p. 209).

For those who doubted Man’s orthodoxy and orthopraxy, in more recent times there were the biographies of Man and his first pupils in the tradition of the *Niddanakatha*, the cycles and legends supporting the veracity of linkage to the primitive Indic *arahān*. These early archetypal figures such as Sariputta, Moggallāna, Mahā Kassapa, Upālī, and many others have long been recognized in Thailand where the “arahant ideal still glows as the jewel in the lotus of the Buddhist religion” (Tambiah 1987*a*, p. 112).



Man spent most of his time (in the early years in particular) with his own practice and his select group of monastic disciples yet encouraging individualized practice as he clearly did not want them to become attached to the presence of their teacher. He was emphatic that his disciples spend the rains retreat period (*phansaa*) by themselves in intensive retreat (*Prawat-khwaampenmaa Khatithamthesanaa khong Phra Raatchawutthajaan* [*Lung Puu Duun*], 1983, p. 9) and not stay for long collectively in the same place at other times. He reasoned that monks should move on before they become a burden to isolated poor hamlets, to spare them from having to provide alms-food daily for small bands of wandering monks.

Later in his life, as Man became more accepted by the ecclesia and affiliated lay élite, he would spend the occasional rains retreat with high-ranking Thammayut monks at provincial monasteries or in the capital.<sup>4</sup> Man's distinctive *dhutanga* teaching mode which he was credited with reviving (despite a long history of forest monks in Thailand) was later spread nationally together with his reputation, facilitated by these high-ranking Thammayut monks. But it was only after his death, or at least in the last nine years of his life, that he became recognized as a "national saint".

#### SLOW AND RISKY WAYFARING

Harsh realities in the countryside, inaccessibility, limited communication and mobility restricted the imposition of the centre to a few selected *monthon* and larger *meuang* (urban settlements) early in the modernization programme. National integration and *sangha* reforms largely account for the eventual co-joining of forest-dwelling monks and the metropolis, with the frontier forests integrally part of the Thai nation-state.

In general, the extension of Thai administrative control over the north-east was facilitated by the creation of modern communication and transportation networks (Keyes 1967*a*, p. 18; O'Connor 1980, p. 36). The rail line to Khorat (Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa) was an important factor in this regard, completed in November 1900 at the cost of many lives from malarial fevers. The rail extension from Khorat to Ubon was not completed until thirty years later. These factors, connected with the education extension programme discussed in the previous chapter, brought northeasterners into closer contact with the central Thai and an awareness of the economic and political might of the centre.



I have also mentioned in the previous chapter the immense difficulty in travelling up-country, with an example from Ubaalii's autobiography. I wish to underline this problem with further written and oral accounts. During the Fifth Reign (1868–1910) messages between the capital and provincial outposts were carried by scheduled runners on horseback or fast boat. One forest monk in Norngkhaai mentioned to me that each village had "specialist" foot runners who made use of a network of forest tracks linking each new settlement. At night time nobody dared move outside the settlements for fear of tigers and malevolent spirits. I was also told that one forest monk wanted to bring his elderly father from Ubon to Udorn but Man advised against it because of the arduous journey and the many "risks". The journey between the two *meuang* would have taken about twenty days (*Siiubonratanaaraam: thiiraleuk songyokchorfaa ubosot Wat Siiubonratanaaraam*, 1968, p. 12).

To Ubon and Norngkhaai it took runners twelve days from the capital; to Luang Phrabaang seventeen days there and thirteen days back (Damrong, in Keyes [1967*a*, p. 18]). Normal movement of people and goods took much longer. For example, by ox-cart from Norngkhaai to Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa it took three weeks and another eight or nine days from Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa (Khoraat Plateau) to Bangkok (Smyth, in Keyes [1967*a*, p. 18]; Tej Bunnag [1977, p. 4]). Keyes went on to say that travel by water was confined to connecting settlements in the northeast on the rivers Muun, Chii, and Maekhong.

In a biography of Ajaan Saam Akinjano,<sup>5</sup> the writer mentions that in the 1920s Saam took fifteen days to travel (*doenthaang*) from the sub-district of Chaniang in Surin province to Nakhorn Phanom, then another five days to Wat Paa Samphong in Sakon Nakhorn, where Man was staying. In another account, Luang Phor Phut Jaaniyo (Wat Paa Saalawan, Khoraat and former pupil of Ajaan Sao) took thirty-one days to walk from Sakon Nakhorn to Ubon. In his autobiography (1978), Ajaan Thet Thetsarangsi (1902 to the present) remarks that as a boy when travelling across the northeastern countryside for the first time in 1916 following his teacher Ajaan Sing Khantayaakhamo (discussed in the next chapter), he was forewarned that it would be a long and perilous journey. Thet went on to say that he was probably the first boy of his age to undertake such a long trek. The group of *kammathaan* monks had set off from Thaabor in Norngkhaai province to Amnaat Jaroen district in Yasothon (about 400 kilometres).



The party [led by Sing]... started their journey from ... [Thaabor], wading through the mud in the swamps and fields, sometimes forcing our way through the forest.

Thet mentions that when Sing became sick from malaria, the group would stay and rest for a while, either in the forest or in a makeshift hut and for food depended solely on alms from the nearest village. The group took three days to reach the town of Udorn from Thaabor, then on to Khorn Kaen, following a trade route to Mahaasaarakhaam, Roi Et, and then Yasothon.

It took us over one month when we arrived at the village of Nongkhon [Amnaat Jaroen] ... the hometown of the Venerable Acharn's (Sing's) mother. (Ibid., pp. 33–34)

#### FOREST MONKS, MISSIONARIES, AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE THAMMAYUT IN THE NORTH

Ferguson and Ramitanondh (1976) suggest that Man and his disciples were effectively pioneer “ground breakers” for the avaricious Thammayut in northern Thailand. This was the way in which the *nikaai* made an impression in the countryside, becoming incorporated eventually into the evolving national hierarchy. Bangkok administration during the first two decades of the twentieth century was obviously concerned about the disunity and regional dissonance in the national *sangha*. In the north Bangkok wanted to bring the idiosyncratic Laannaa-thai (present-day northern Thailand) *sangha* under tighter ecclesiastical control; similarly in the northeast, for the *thudong-kammathaàn* monks. New administrative regulations and hierarchical structure aimed at regulating the behaviour of monks and imposing uniformity across the country were endorsed by Chinawonsiriwat (Sangkharat, between 1926 and 1937) by recourse to the authority of the Buddha. Chinawonsiriwat says that even the Buddha's primitive *sangha* needed a centralized administration (Praphat 1964, pp. 468–73).

From Ferguson and Ramitanondh's comments regarding the pioneering and evolutionary nature of forest *samnak* in the north, the ascetic monks should be seen as forerunners of establishment Buddhism and a passing, unstable feature on the Thai religious landscape. Thus eventually forest *samnak* are taken over by the establishment Thammayut in its vigorous missionizing quest (or following Tambiah [1984, p. 163], part of the national venture to eradicate localized bases of charismatic power, as with Khruubaa



Siiwichai). While essentially correct, as I shall argue for the northeast, it fails to account for the persistent feature of certain forest monasteries. This at least suggests that we focus attention on pupillages rather than monasteries as such. Northeastern pupils of Man such as Waen Sujinno (Wat Doi Mae Pang, Phrao district), Luang Katapunyo (Wat Samraaniwaat, Lampaang), Sim Phutthaajaaro (Wat Thamphaaplong, Chiang Dao), and a lesser known Waen Thanpaalo (Wat Tham Phra-sabaai, Lampaang) followed the master during his *thudong* excursion to the north (the “third phase” of Man’s monastic life). But unlike Man’s many other northeastern disciples, these monks did not return and settled in the north to establish their own residential base *samnak* and line of pupils. The Thammayut were indeed close behind wandering forest monks, either in establishing monasteries at *samnak* where the “frontier” monks had since moved on or died, or in a vicarious routinization process of wandering monks themselves (monks who had gained popularity and recognition locally).

On the whole there were few recorded attempts to establish a Phra Thudong Kammathaan tradition in the north. Thet (1978, p. 159) is the only source which mentions Man’s personal interest in establishing a *samnak* for *kammathaan* monks in Chiang Mai, although Thet apparently convinced Man that this was not feasible. Thet Thetsarangsii<sup>6</sup> was a one-time disciple of Man but he became preoccupied in missionizing for the Thammayut in frontier provinces — including Phuket in the south (some other well-known monks involved in promoting the Thammayut were Ajaans Daeng, Duun, Sing, and Mahaa Pin — mentioned in the next chapter). In Thet’s autobiography, Tisso’s nephew, Somdet Phra Mahaawiirawong “Phim Thammatharo” (1897–1974),<sup>7</sup> asked Thet to be abbot at a traditional Mon Lamphuun monastery. Phim at the time was acting as *sangha* administrative supervisor (*Phuukamkabkaan-khanasong*) and “religious education manager” (*Phuujadkaan kaanseuksaa pariyat-tham*) of the famous Wat Jedii Luang in Chiang Mai (*Phimphot*, Phim 1975). The former abbot at Thet’s Lamphuun monastery had apparently been impressed by the wandering Thammayut monks who on occasions had encamped at the monastery. This was followed by a formal request for re-registering the monastery as Thammayut. The occasional residence of Thammayut forest monks was seemingly sufficient justification for this request. Thet accepted this position as pioneering abbot for one *phansaa* before returning to the northeast (*ibid.*, pp. 176–78). Phim also asked another senior wandering monk-disciple of Man, Ajaan Orn Yaanasiri (1902–81), at that time in the north, to teach



reform discipline and new monastic “habits” (*nisai*) to newly ordained Thammayut monks at Lamphuun. But, unlike Thet, Orn decided to avoid this “call of duty” and disappeared back to the northeast (Yaanasiri et al. 1977, pp. 96–97).

Though as we have seen, some northeastern forest teachers remained in the north during the course of their wanderings following Man, the ascetic forest tradition affirmed and averred by Man remained somewhat out-of-place and unassimilable in this region. This indicated its distinctive northeastern regional heritage (even today the casual visitor to the few forest monasteries in the north will notice that the inmates are mostly northeasterners). With few exceptions Man’s early disciples were northeasterners and, in their wanderings across the country preferred eventually to settle in their home region as Man himself did after spending eleven years in the mountains around Chiang Mai (Mahaa Bua 1982, p. 109).

One of the most curious features of Man’s life story is the reason for his leaving for the north for such a long period in the first place. Thet (1978, pp. 74–75) mentions “criticisms” which drove Man into “exile” in the north. According to another source this was also connected with a “decline” in the eremitic standard of practice due to the tendency of northeastern forest monks to set up forest *samnakh* everywhere for the Thammayut. A former pupil of Man, Phra Yaanaphaso,<sup>8</sup> said that Man left the northeast in part because of the attention he was gaining at this time from large numbers of lay and monastic disciples continuously seeking him out. He thus sought solitude and seclusion in order to win final *arahan’ship* (*henjaeng*), which according to his principal biographer (Mahaa Bua) was achieved whilst residing in the Chiang Dao caves.<sup>9</sup>

Jao Khun Ubaalii, who had earlier visited Chiang Mai, told Man that the north was a suitable place to practise, with many secluded forests and mountain caves, good climate, and the Laannaa people having great “faith” in the *saasanaa* (religion). Another informant<sup>10</sup> mentioned that Man was getting harassed in the northeast because of continued criticism by both *pariyat* and village monks (the motives for this hostility will become clearer further on). Thet’s account seems unreliable as the date given for Man’s departure to the north is 1926, although it was some two or three years later that he actually departed. Around 1926 there was a great deal of hostility in Ubon province where Man was staying between *nikaai* and between factions within the Thammayut (*pariyat* administrators and wandering forest monks). I shall return to this incident later on; suffice to say that these events,



with Man and his pupils in the middle, may have been a contributing factor in Man's decision to leave the northeast, at least temporarily.

Two earlier-mentioned writers, Ferguson and Ramitanondh (1976), erroneously say that Man "pioneered" — or, as Tambiah (1987*a*, p. 118) has similarly mentioned, "reactivated" — the establishment of the Thammayut at the famous Wat Jedii Luang (literally the "royal stupa") in Chiang Mai, at the instigation of Ubaalii. In fact it was the latter who founded this monastery, though because of Man's reputation in more recent times his participation in establishing this historic monastery was more imaginary than fact. Details surrounding Man's residence at Wat Jedii Luang are discussed below, taken from three biographies, one official history of Wat Jedii Luang (Thepsaarawethii 1988), and numerous monastic informants in Bangkok, Udonnthaanii, and Chiang Mai. It should be remembered that Man, whilst emblematic of the "homeless" wanderer, the "world renouncer", was still influenced by both formal and informal *sangha* obligations through the Thammayut. Man, as with some of his pupils, may have been duty-bound to perform some *sangha* administrative functions directed from senior monks in the Thammayut hierarchy. This was one reason why Man preferred to be on the move all the time, and a potential "problem" which he often warned his disciples of.

Ubaalii had previously been to Chiang Mai, probably at the instigation of Wachirayaan and an invitation from Jao Kaew Nawarat, the Prince of Chiang Mai and Jao Phrayaa Mukkhamontrii, the *uparaat* (king's envoy) for the Northern Region (Phaak Neua). The present abbot of Wat Boromniwaat, Phra Thep-panyaamunii "Buu", mentions that Man made a preliminary visit to the north with Ubaalii (at the latter's request) in 1927/28, after a report had been seen by Wachirayaan from the *uparaat* on the poor state of the Laannaa *sangha* and prospects for missionary work. In fact, the then *uparaat* Phrayaa Raatchakhun and his mother Khunying Noi were ardent supporters of Man and praised his strict asceticism and assumed accomplishments (Thet 1978, p. 55). Khunying Noi first met Man in Udonn some years earlier (Lii n.d. [b], pp. 19–20). Ubaalii had been familiar with conditions in the north since his brief exploratory visit, mentioned in the previous chapter, to Chiangtung in 1922.

Ubaalii was the first Thammayut abbot of Wat Jedii Luang in 1928 and among his first tasks was the reorganization of the monastery as a centre for the Thammayut in the north. Originally, there were five surrounding Sangkhaawaat (Pali: *Sanghavaasa*, monks' residences), namely, Phantao,



Sukkhamin, Sobfaang, Horthaan, and Chotikaaraam. These were grouped around the Phutthaawaat (Pali: *Buddhavasa*, place for the Buddha image, public precincts), the fourteenth century royal *jedii*, the locus of sanctity.<sup>11</sup> The purpose was to combine the various parts into one monastery. Ubaalii then asked Man to come and stay for one year (or perhaps more realistically one *phansaa*, see Mahaa Bua 1986a, pp. 106, 133)<sup>12</sup> to teach meditation and monastic discipline to Chiang Mai monks. Though keen to visit the north and distance himself from the northeast for a while, Man was reluctant to stay at the monastery for any length of time, something he had never done anywhere before, though he eventually agreed.

In 1932 Ubaalii became sick and returned to Wat Boromniwaat, where he died shortly after his return. Man thus found himself in charge of the monastery that same year (or part, during the *phansaa*) until Phra Khruu Naphiisii officially took over the following year. Naphiisii was a somewhat arrogant monk and had apparently been in trouble with ecclesiastical authorities and disciplined around this time for behaving discourteously to senior Mahaanikaai monks (he reputedly got up from a meeting before his Mahaanikaai seniors had left; see Khaneungnit [1985, p. 78]).

Man received official confirmation (*traatang*) from the Department of Religious Affairs “asking” him to be abbot and *upatchaa* (his registration certificate as preceptor was issued in 1932) with a Phra Khruu rank in the Thaanaanukrom category and designatory name “Winaithorn” (see the discussion in the next chapter). The Prince of Chiang Mai was to be the official sponsor and he had to make all administrative arrangements. The fact that Man reluctantly agreed to these tasks is little known and indeed the cause of some slight embarrassment to his present-day ascetic disciples (this is left out of his many life accounts and certainly does not “fit” his reclusive image). But, what is even less well-known is the fact that in his position as *upatchaa* for the Thammayut he ordained one monk, Phra Palat-ket (since deceased).<sup>13</sup>

Ajaan Wiriyang’s (1980, p. 179) life account of Man places events earlier and says Ubaalii asked Jao Khun Panyaaphisaanthen “Nuu” (Wat Sapathum, Bangkok) to post Man to Wat Jedii Luang as abbot in 1929. Man had been spending the *phansaa* with Nuui at the time. Nuui (1864–1944), also from Ubon, had been Man’s occasional travelling companion when the former had been visiting up-country on administrative matters and when Man had one of his rare visits to the capital. Nuui had been originally ordained under the pioneering monk Thewathammii “Maao” (mentioned in the previous chapter) at Wat Siithong in Ubon. Facts related by Wiriyang may be essentially



correct: Ubaalii was Nuu's senior, but I take the dating as incorrect and place events, as mentioned above, three years later.

Man resigned his official position the same year it was offered to him and had only conceded out of respectful duty to his senior friend Ubaalii. The latter had great respect for Man because of his mind-reading powers, strict asceticism, and personal conduct. But now Ubaalii had died and Man was no longer under any obligation to stay, plus the fact that Man was frustrated by the disinterest of Laannaa monks at Wat Jedii Luang in the discipline and meditation practice. He then once again returned to wandering and seclusion.

An account is given in the autobiography of Lii (n.d. [b], pp. 20–23), who claimed to have been with Man during the *phansaa* of 1932. Chiang Mai royalty and elite supporters built a small wooden single *kuti* for the ascetic monk (since pulled down by the present abbot) in a banana grove at the rear of the *sangkhaawaat* and took care of his personal needs. After the rains, Wat Boromniwaat was arranging Ubaalii's funeral and invited most senior monks from Wat Jedii Luang (and elsewhere) to attend, leaving Man in charge of the monastery (because of *phansaa* seniority). After Man received his official letter inviting him to remain as abbot and *upatchaa* he decided to leave as soon as possible. As one informant told me, when Man decided to leave he left his regalia of office behind with the comment that "Phra Khruu Man stays here!"

When Man first arrived at Chiang Mai railway station his reputation had already preceded him and he was met by a small coterie of notable supporters. He made his position clear and told his audience that as a wandering monk he intended to reside in the forests and mountains outside the town (Mahaa Bua 1982, p. 107). Man's experience at Wat Jedi Luang had been to some extent a painful lesson and thereafter he withdrew himself from monastery administration. One reliable account mentions that during his eleven years in the north, Man spent a total of only three *phansaa* (1929, 1932, and 1938) at Wat Jedii Luang (Yaanasiri et al. 1977, p. 95). According to Thet (1978, p. 110), Man's final departure pleased the resident *pariyat* monks, as when Thet arrived at Wat Jedii Luang shortly after Man had left to ask the whereabouts of his teacher, he was met with some contemptuous references to the old "vagabond" monk.

After Man's brief functionary role, Naphiisii became acting abbot in 1933 followed by Phra Khruu Mahaa Jetiyaaphibaan, the third abbot from 1934 to 1959, to the present abbot, Jao Khun Thepsaarawethii (1988, p. 4).



Ubaalii's attempt, as mentioned above, to integrate five surrounding *sangkhaawaat*, largely uninhabited for over 200 years, led to a long drawn-out argument between the heads of the five local monasteries as to who should be nominated principal abbot of Wat Jedii Luang.<sup>14</sup> Somdet Mahaawiirawong "Phim", who was later sent to attempt to resolve this problem, had met Man during the latter's last *phansaa* at Wat Jedii Luang in 1938 — the year the monastery was made a "royal *wat*". Phim, impressed with Man, asked him during his residency that *phansaa* to teach meditation. Then shortly after his rains residence, Man reluctantly agreed to return to the northeast at the invitation of the aforementioned Phra Thammajedii "Mahaa Juum". Interestingly, Phim, like his famous *pariyat* uncle Tisso before him, tried to practise meditation in the latter part of his life, convinced by then of its salutary worth.

From Thet (1978, p. 159), Wiriyang (1980, pp. 218–19), and first-hand accounts it is apparent that Man, after his long period in the north, had no Laannaa-thai monastic followers. Although some did follow him and undertake the *thudong* practices, these monks did not stay long. Man explained that northeastern monks had greater endurance than those in the north, who tended to prefer traditional short-term ordinations. Keyes<sup>15</sup> also says that in the northeast monks tended to ordain for longer periods than those in the north or central part of the country. Keyes goes on to say that the northeastern tradition placed greater emphasis on the practice of the *winai* than the northern *sangha*. The stricter adherence of the disciplinary rules in the Thai-Lao *sangha* tended to make remote northeastern monks more supportive of the reforms undertaken by urban elite monks. Keyes also mentions that monks from no other region of the country had been so responsive to the reforms as in the northeast. As discussed in the previous chapter, many senior high-ranking northeasterners were in the vanguard of the Thammayut reforms throughout the countryside.

#### THE HOME RETURN; THE MASTER'S LAST FIVE YEARS

Before Man went to the north he left behind a number of inured pupilary cells, as well as some prominent lay followers. In 1939 Jao Khun Thammajedii "Mahaa Juum" had been asked by Man's many disciples to go to the north personally and bring Man back (Mahaa Bua 1982, p. 109; Thet 1978, p. 181). A number of times before, Man had been asked by his pupils to return but, as related in his biography by Mahaa Bua, since his "attain-



ment" he was disinclined to leave the peace and solitude of the mountains.

When he eventually arrived back, his reputation was firmly established in the countryside and in the capital. Many monks and prominent laity (including the provincial court judge from Sakon Nakhorn and the District Officer for Phannaanikhom district) came to see him and seek *dhamma* instruction. On his return journey he stopped at Khoraat, then Udornthaanii, before going on to forests in Sakon Nakhorn province. Although in his seventies, he continued to instruct disciples and teach in small face-to-face groups (Mahaa Bua 1986*b*, pp. 285–86). As Mahaa Bua explains, even at this time he was

still active ... and did not like to stay in any one place for any length of time ... [and] preferred wandering alone, living a solitary life in the wilds. (1982, pp. 213–14)

In fact the many accounts by his disciples relate an ongoing relentless search over the years for the reclusive master throughout the countryside. Thet, for example, says in this regard:

We took leave ... to continue our search for Phra Acharn Mun [Man]. Having failed to obtain any useful information about him from various places he used to stay, we decided to go ... into Burma ... In all these places we were disappointed ... our pilgrim wandering ... was therefore a relentless search for Phra Acharn Mun. (1978, pp. 123–24)

One elderly female informant Kimhuai Sae-ia, a Buddhist nun (*mae chii*), related to the influential Norngkhaai family of Kimkai mentioned in a later chapter, gave some insightful details on Man. Kimhuai had met Man in the later part of his life, some fifty years ago, introduced by her mother. She found his presence austere and inspiring and shortly afterwards ordained as an eight-preceptor *mae chii* (or *mae khao*) under one of his pupils, Ajaan Bunmaa Thitapemo (died in 1980), whom she followed to Chiang Mai, where Man was staying at that time. Kimhuai last saw Man a year before his death in Norng Pheur village, Sakon Nakhorn province, in the heart of the Phuuphaan mountain range. As mentioned before, this was where Man spent the last five years of his life. The village of Norng Pheur is very isolated, even today, and when Man fell ill in 1949 it was with some difficulty that his supporters carried him about 30 kilometres from this isolated *samnak* to the main Udorn–Sakon Nakhorn road. The group travelled the whole day, arriving late at Wat Non Phuu in Phannaanikhom district. Some supporters



from the town had arranged for a government Main Roads Department vehicle to take the dying saint on to Wat Paa Sutthaawaat, then on to the outskirts of Sakon Nakhorn town. Man had asked to be taken there to die as it was situated near to an urban market-place as he expressed concern that if he died in the village the many hundreds of devotees coming to his cremation would have to kill large numbers of forest animals to feed themselves. This account by a number of informants is clearly meant to show the compassionate side of Man.

The small 10 hectare forest *samnak* (formerly a deserted Mahaanikaai monastery) where Man stayed in present-day Naanai sub-district is now called Wat Paa Phuurithattatherawaat (after Man's monk-name), and sanctified as a proper Thammayut monastery in 1982. The monastery is situated among the Yor-speaking minority and today remains largely unchanged because of its relative isolation.<sup>16</sup> However, the visitor may note a few alterations such as Man's now concretized *jongkrom* (walking meditation) path at the side of his hut, modern septic toilets, and a lot less surrounding forest than in the late 1940s. The local school at Baan Norng Pheur is also named after Man, as his presence is indelibly impressed in the minds of the older members of the local community. The *kuti* where Mahaa Bua and Wiriayang (both biographers of Man) stayed is marked by a roughly made signboard, the monks' residences and original *saalaa* (community hall) with timber shingle roof remains in original condition. Under Man's *kuti* is his old *laangforknang* (or *bork*), a hollowed log about two metres in length for use as a receptacle for washing and treating leather. Infrequently, tourists from other provinces come and visit the *samnak* organized by devotees of Man's pupils, and the king visited the site in 1976, 1977, and 1979 during the royal fervour for forest monks while at his seasonal residence at the nearby Phuuphaan palace.

Monks who stayed with Man at this critical last five-year period were at the forward line of pupillary seniority (that is, a period in the pupillage of the master which does not necessarily correspond to length of time as a monk; gerontocratic or monastic seniority). These included well-known monks such as Mahaa Bua, Thet, Wan, Lui, and Juan. The present abbot, Ajaan Sorn Yaanawiiro, is ninety-five years of age and was a former lay supporter of Man from Norng Pheur village. At the time of my visit, the monastery had two resident monks and three novices, as well as four *mae chii* in a nearby female section also from the local Yor village. Sorn in fact was ordained shortly after Man's funeral; he was then fifty-eight years of age.



In an interview (speaking only the local idiom), Sorn could only remember looking after the then-ailing Man, massaging him and keeping his *kuti* clean. Even then, Sorn said, Man would continue to deliver penetrative exempla and instruction on meditation. Many people would trek in daily to visit the by now well-known saint from all over the countryside. The monastery has a branch *samnak* a few kilometres further down the road called Samnaksong Daankoi, and the head monk was able to provide more details on Man's last years. Ajaan Buu, seventy-one years of age, had only been ordained for nine years, previously married with eleven children (five deceased at the time of writing). Buu was Headman (Phuuyaibaan) at Baan Norng Pheur in 1956 and later, after the death of his wife, he was encouraged to ordain by the visiting king in 1979 at Wat Paa Phuurithattatherawaat — initially as a *phaa khao* (lay eight-preceptor wearing white clothes).

Thus it will be seen from the above description that not long after Man left the village, the monastery and adjacent *samnak* became autochthonous, the monastic inmates consisting solely of resident villagers. This was in contrast to the time of Man when the local Yor were at best occasional lay helpers and may indicate the gradual shift towards localization of the *sangha* as a component of collective village life. After Man died, his pupils dispersed to continue wandering and to seek new alignments, leaving behind them only local *luang taa* (less mobile elderly monks who ordain late in their life).

During the time of Man's residence at Norng Pheur there were about sixty to seventy monks coming and going each day, as well as lay followers and supporters from Bangkok, Khoraat, Khorn Kaen, Chiang Mai, Udorn, Sakon Nakhorn, and from the east, Janthaburii (one or two of Man's pupils came from Janthaburii, and Ajaan Lii Thammatharo established the so-called "Janthaburii lineage"). During this time, there was no Jao Khana Amphoe (Thammayut) at Phannaanikhom, only Mahaanikaai. This monk, Phra Khruu Phannaakhiikhomunii, was not pleased with the large number of *dhutanga* monks encamped in the area (Ajaan Wan Uttamo 1981, p. 9), but because of Man's reputation dared not intervene. The Jao Khana Jangwat (Thammayut), a monk named Ariyamethii "Mahaa Seng", was seemingly not concerned about events at Baan Norng Pheur. By this time the Thammayut administrators were more tolerant of Man's wanderers, or at least showed a perfunctory acceptance of these institutional misfits.

Man's impact on the twin villages of Naanai and Norng Pheur can be appreciated in the sense that today, as mentioned above, largely because of their isolation, the monastic inmates are from these villages and attempt to



maintain the strict ascetic standards which he espoused. When Man first arrived there was a Mahaanikaai monastery in the village which initially resented his presence at the nearby deserted forest monastery. Local informants said that the village monks would show their dislike by stealing food from Man's disciples — along with other similar pranks until Man eventually settled the dispute. After this, the forest *samnak* and its ageing meditation master gained increasing respect and support from within the village. Significantly, today there is no local Mahaanikaai village monastery in either of these adjoining villages; I know of no other similar situation in the northeast at the various impact points where Man and his disciples established themselves.

#### WAT ARANYAWAASII: A CASE-STUDY IN THE PROCESS OF DOMESTICATION

In the following discussion I shall show the recurrent pattern in the formation of wandering encampments to conventional monasteries, in both *nikaai*. In Bangkok, as O'Connor (1978) has shown, there is a unilineal trend in the establishment of some urban monasteries, bearing broad similarities to the configuration in the northeastern countryside. Some of these urban monasteries would grow around wandering forest monks, who after a while would disappear to be replaced by "ordinary" administrative monks.

In part this forest genesis of wat, perhaps central to the historic spread of Buddhism represents an ideotypic division of labour whose sanctity attracts the lay society they flee and the more stationary monks whose texts, schools and duties depend upon established wat.<sup>17</sup> (Ibid., p. 148)

The evolving process of domestication can be appreciated in the transition from initial temporary wandering abodes used by forest monks at various "impact" points in the countryside to fully fledged Thammayut monasteries with permanent consecrated boundaries (*phatthasiimaa*). The following example shows how this evolutionary process usually occurs in the northeast.

Wat Aranyawaasii in Thaabor district, Norngkhaai, is today an important local centre for the Thammayut. When Man and Sao first set up their *klot* (monks' umbrellas used as temporary abodes when travelling) in the dense forest on the outskirts of Thaabor village, the only indication that it had previously been a place of sanctity was the remains of ancient *jedii*. A mon-



astery was supposedly first built in the forest during the height of Wiengjan (Vientiane) some time between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was in fact during the fervent sixteenth century that the Lao king Phothisarath first sent for pure monks (headed by Phra Thep-mongkhon-thera) and the Pali Canon from the Sinhalese forest monks resident in northern Siam (Viravong 1964, p. 49). By the latter part of this period Wiengjan had become an important regional centre of Buddhist learning with many monasteries being built along both sides of the Maekhong River. Up until Man and Sao's residence, the monastery site had long been deserted. In fact many of the so-called "Khong" style monasteries of around this period lay abandoned on both sides of the Maekhong.

The only visitors over the centuries since Wat Aranyawaasii was deserted were the occasional *thudong* monk and in 1916 Ajaan Suwan Sujinno,<sup>18</sup> an early pupil of Man. Suwan, originally from Phibuunmangsaahaan district in Ubon, whilst wandering along the Maekhong first came across the abandoned *jedii*. At this time Man and a small band of about ten disciples had just left Kamcha'ii district in Nakorn Phanom, destined for Sakon Nakhorn, and eventually Norngbualamphuu in Udonthani province. As mentioned in the last chapter, Norngbualamphuu was an important centre for the emerging Thammayut. Suwan had gone back and forth to the Thaabor forest and on each occasion received a positive reception from the villagers. As recorded in a biographical sketch of the monastery (Thet, ed. 1986), Suwan was in no way concerned about propagandist or promotional aspects of the reform movement (*latthi-nikaai*) but only in teaching the Buddha's doctrine to the villagers. After Suwan, Ajaan Duun Atulo stayed the *phansaa* at the forest (this monk was eventually to become the Jao Khana Jangwat, Thammayut, Surin province). Then, in 1925, nine years after Man set out from his base in Nakhorn Phanom, his small band arrived at Thaabor to stay for the coming *phansaa*.

At this stage the villagers started to build temporary shelters for the reclusive monks. Besides Man, Sao, and Thet (the modern patriarch of the monastery), there were other monks who were later to become well-known, such as Ajaans Kuu Thammathinno, Oun Thammatharo,<sup>19</sup> Orn Yaanasiri, Fan Aajaro, and Kwaa Sumano. The biography of Ajaan Fan (Yaanasiri et al. 1977, p. 35) also mentions another lesser-known disciple of Man, Ajaan Saan from Ubon. Most of these monks later went on to establish their own line of pupils and settled bases.

It was Ajaan Thet who was largely responsible for building up Wat



Aranyawaasii in the preceding years. A short time after the group arrived, Sao went off by himself to settle near Wat Phra-ngaamsiimongkhon (in later years headed by another of Man's pupils, Ajaan Ornsii) which was then only "untamed" forest. Thet and Oun went to spend the *phansaa* of 1926 at Baan Naa Chaang Nam, while the rest of Man's group went back to Nakhorn Phanom — this time Thaa-uthen district — spending the rains at Baan Saamphong. Man never returned.

In 1933 Thet returned from Khoraat where he had been staying and spent the next rains at Thaabor before going on to Chiang Mai with Ornsii. The following year Ajaans Bunmaa Thitapemo and Rian Waralaapho (see below) stayed the rains in the Thaabor forest, which was starting to gain increasingly more attention. In 1936, a wealthy local Chinese woman offered money for a new *bot* (Pali: *uposathagara*, a consecrated assembly hall, indicative of monastery development as discussed in the next chapter) and for the restoration of existing dwellings. Three years later Thet came back and the first permanent *kuti* was built by the same patron. Up until this time the monks had largely used either their *klot* or makeshift shelters consisting of split bamboo and leaves. The *siimaa* was officially laid that year around the new *bot*, indicating the presence of institutional elements in the Thammayut. Over the coming nine years Thet — who always maintained firm links with Thammayut development interests (*pheuai phrae*) — stayed on, and with support from a wealthy local businessman and rice-mill owner gradually built up the monastery.

In the next phase, Thet's mother and older brother died and he then decided to go away for a while to Janthaburii in the east, but after first arranging for a number of dependable monks to take care of the monastery. He encouraged an elderly lay devotee named Naak to ordain at the early Thammayut monastery in Norngkhaai, Wat Siimeuang. Naak was then fifty-three years of age and had been a lay supporter of Wat Aranyawaasii since its early years. Thet also persuaded a friend to ordain but he died shortly afterwards. Next, Thet invited an Ajaan Lot to be abbot, but a little while later he went off to Bangkok, leaving the elderly Naak as abbot. When Thet eventually returned from Janthaburii he settled at his present monastery in nearby Sii Chiang Mai district, Wat Hin Maak Peng. Man and his group by this time had long since moved on with no interest in the development of the monastery, leaving it to Thammayut administrative monks and former forest dwellers who were too old to wander (*Luang Taa*).

Today, with no forest left, there is little evidence of the monastery's



primitive origins due to developments both inside and outside. At the time of my visit, the monastery was run by a forty-one-year old *pariyat* monk, Phra Khruu Kittiworakhun, the ecclesiastical sub-district head (Jao Khana Tambon). This monk had been a former pupil of a first-generation disciple of Man, Ajaan Rian Waralaapho, who also settled at Sii Chiang Mai district, Wat Aranyabanphot.<sup>20</sup> Rian, as with a number of Man's former pupils, did not remain a *dhutanga* monk but became involved in education and administration and is now the ecclesiastical district head (Jao Khana Amphoe) for the Thammayut.

Ajaan Naak (ninety-three years of age in 1988), although still nominally abbot, is too feeble to supervise the monastery and resides incapacitated, like a museum piece, in the original *kuti* built for Thet. Expensive new dwellings have appeared, *khanathaew* (monks' dwellings in "rows", a feature of domesticated monasteries), a double-storey *saalaa*, and a recently completed *bot* costing 4 million baht ([US\$153 846], of which only 280,000 baht [US\$10,769] came from monastery funds), which Thet himself helped to raise through his influential Bangkok connections. The *bot*, completed in 1984, was designed by an architect from the Fine Arts Department to represent "art of both sides of the Khong River", the door and window panels by a well-known local Lao wood-carver. In 1978 the monastery was given the lucrative "model development *wat*" award (*Wat Phathanaatuayaang*) by the Department of Religious Affairs. During my visit to the monastery there were five resident monks and seven novices, although with the recently completed large double-storey *kuti*, many more monks can be accommodated and are able to attend the new *pariyat* study courses.

When I asked Kittiworakhun to explain the connection as he saw it between the wandering forest monks and the establishment Thammayut, his reply reflected the widespread view that forest monks and the Thammayut are indivisible. They are simply contraposed at different diachronic points along the same developmental axis. Forest monks in the line of Ajaan Man are seen as "frontiersmen", the precursors of monastic reform. Whilst not mentioning the metropolitan connection, Kittiworakhun went on to say that the Thammayut in the countryside provided the most germane organizational framework at the time to implement changes to the lax and dissonant localized *sangha*. This in turn is integrally linked with the natural growth of the monastery from a *thudong* site where an informal gathering of forest monks meet and rest after their wanderings, or stay for the *phansaa*, to the establishment of *samnakh song*, influential patronage and



eventual incorporation into an institutional *pariyat* monastery (concerned with standardized religious instruction and monastic administration). In this sense, following a now-familiar theme, forest monks are thus seen as spearheading nationalist ideology through religious reforms in the countryside. But in fact the association between northeastern forest monks, state expansion, and Thammayut interests is more politically complex than Kittiworakhun suggests and does not explain why Man would want to establish a meditation tradition in both the reform and indigenous orders (see Chapter Nine).

Wat Aranyawaasii is by no means an exceptional case, and as one young forest monk told me, simply the advance of “civilization” (*khwaamjaroen*) with both positive and negative connotations (depending on which point of the developmental axis one is ideologically situated). Similar effects are felt at most forest monasteries during the latter “climacteric” phase (see Chapter Seven for a discussion on the four development stages). Following the meandering road along the Maekhong in the neighbouring district of Sii Chiang Mai one comes to other “forest” monasteries — Wat Aranyabanphot and Wat Hin Maak Peng — where similar developments have taken place with a not dissimilar time frame. At the latter monastery where the now-ailing Ajaan Thet resides, the assistant abbot with fifteen *phansaa* in 1988 largely controls the monastery. This monk comes from a wealthy Chinese family of goldsmiths in the town of Udonthanaai. There are around forty monastic residents, twelve are novices under eighteen years of age engaged largely in studying for their ecclesiastical *nak tham* examinations (a series of three clerical examinations introduced by Wachirayaan in 1910 to complement the Pali studies curriculum) held at the nearby Wat Aranyabanphot under the above-mentioned Ajaan Rian Waralaapho. From the remaining twenty-eight monks, about twenty (during the time of my visit) before the coming rains were traditional “rains” ordinands with little or marginal interest in the *dhutanga*. This left only eight long-term committed monks, most of whom will not stay for long but will move on to more secluded branch forest *samnak*.

At none of the three “forest” monasteries today are there indications of an orientation towards consistent meditation practice. Much of Wat Hin Maak Peng resembles a picnic park, the monastery even situated on foreign tourist maps, noted for its scenic beauty. Furthermore there is a noticeable theory-practice entanglement and embroilment, inevitable as the monastery’s new leaders search for a new compact, whilst still latching on to its pris-



tine *dhutanga* heritage. When Thet dies, the new institutional model already in a gestatory phase will emerge displacing any vestige of the past when the monastery attracted *thudong kammathan* monks from all over the northeast. In the transition to a *pariyat* institution, the remaining meditation monks are encouraged to practise with critical textual perspective, to measure one against the other in order to know where one is along the normative doctrinal path. In this process, the text itself becomes the authority, replacing the traditional emphasis on the meditation master and intuitive praxis as taught by Man.

#### FOREST TEACHERS, COLONIZATION, AND THE FOUNDING OF MONASTERIES IN THE NORTHEAST

The charismatic authority of the teacher is a central element in understanding the developmental pattern of forest monasteries and lineages. There are basically two primary phases in the northeastern countryside: first, an original peripatetic period whereby the teacher attracts a core of dedicated disciples (including lay followers and supporters) at various impact points and, second, a settled residency in a forested site outside a village and the formation of a *samnak*. In this second “settlement” phase there would be no more than a handful of pupils (possibly up to ten or fifteen monks with no more than a few novices from the local village), with the wandering regimen (*kaandoen thudong*) an optional practice. Though by this time the foundation teachers are too old to wander around the countryside, which then leads into what I have called a “climacteric” stage.

The creation of enduring permanent bases (into formally established monasteries) did not always happen, as forest *samnak* sometimes survived only for as long as the teacher remained alive, as shown earlier in the case of Oun Thammatharo (see endnote 19). I should emphasize that teachers themselves do not always have the intention of establishing permanent *samnak* as this often happens around them through the enthusiastic efforts of their disciples.

According to Wiriyang (1980, p. 174), in 1926 Man and his teacher Ajaan Sao called all their Phra Kammathan pupils to discuss application of additional rules for living in the forest. They also wanted to give guidance to disciples in the teaching of meditation and set special regulations for establishing *samnak song*. Thet (1978, pp. 74–75) alludes to the proliferation of forest *samnak* beginning around this time at various liminal impact places



in the northeast. Some of these *samnak* were set up by Man's pupils during the course of their wanderings at the entreaty of devoted villagers or local Siamese government officials.

It should be noted that since the 1902 Sangha Act, Article 9 (a),<sup>21</sup> formal procedure was outlined for establishing *samnak song*. Permission now had to be obtained from the Government District Officer (Naai Amphoe) and relevant Jao Khana Amphoe. A meeting of *monthon* ecclesiastical heads (Jao Khana Monthon) in 1912 at Bangkok took the general outline further and elaborated on points not clear in this Sangha Act. On one issue it was decided that if people lived some distance from the nearest monastery and wished to have an opportunity to make merit (*tham bun*) and have monks for the performance of mortuary rituals, there were grounds for requesting the setting up of a *samnak song*. Furthermore, if the people then leave the area, there can no longer be a *samnak song*. In essence, this affirmed the mutualism between the laity and monastic *sangha* and the importance of propinquity. If people wanted to maintain permanent settlement and show the local officials that they could support the *samnak song*, then the *samnak* may apply for preliminary consecration (*wisungkhaamasiimaa*), (National Archives, *Seuksaathikaan*, Sixth Reign, 10/3).

Since Article 13 of 1902, monks were required to carry personal identification cards (*bai sutthi*) when travelling outside the monastery. The card stipulated the name of the preceptor (*upatchaa*), monastery where registered, *nikaai*, and so on. The *bai sutthi* (which in fact is rarely checked, as one forest monk told me) was issued by one's abbot of a residential monastery. As far as I can ascertain the card was not a problem to Man's wanderers as they tended to move within *nikaai* structures, although undoubtedly on the fringe of social acceptability. Also, as already noted and shown in detail later, forest monks helped to facilitate the growth of Thammayut monasteries in the frontier provinces.

Though Man himself never established permanent bases, it is difficult to ascertain his attitude in this regard due to contradictory and elusive evidence. Man's charismatic reputation was founded on the basis of his peripatetic life ways, his determined independence from routinized bases. Some accounts mention that the master discouraged the formation of permanent monasteries<sup>22</sup> which he believed would eventually be detrimental to the ascetic forest *thudong kammathan* tradition. However, even in his lifetime Man must have seen this starting to take place around him through the activities of many of his own pupils.



An important factor accounting for the early settlement preference of forest monks may have derived from the Sangha Act of 1941. In Article 45, official disapproval was expressed of wandering monks without settled bases, or registered permanent places of abode. The article stipulated that all monks, without exception, were to be attached to an officially recognized monastery. In the case of Man's Thammayut forest monks ordained (or reordained) at principal provincial monasteries, institutional connection was affirmed and wandering permitted only out of *phansaa*.

Article 45 of the 1941 Sangha Act was replaced through the implementation of the 2505 [1962] Sangha Act, currently in force. Informants in the Department of Religious Affairs remarked to me that this early article is no longer, if indeed it ever was, a contentious issue (though this may have been to monks not correctly ordained, and those from neighbouring countries).

As I have suggested above, the usual wandering pattern for Man was that during the course of his journeys he would selectively camp at secluded sites in caves or in the forest, though not far from human habitation. Some of Man's impact points in the northeast (see Map 1) include Tham Phaabing in Loei; Phuuphaakuut and Baan Saamphong in Nakhorn Phanom; Baan Pheur and Norngbualamphuu in Udorn; Thaabor in Norngkhaai; and Baan Paa Khok in Sakon Nakhorn. After a while Man would move on, his disciples following in his footsteps. These liminal sites founded by wandering monks, marked by their exclusiveness and separation from the institutional *sangha*, would become the focus of residential *samnak* (and thus eventually reincorporation into institutional "structure" through domestication). Comparing Map 1 with Map 2 one may note the correspondence between the spatial density of settled contemporary forest monasteries and Man's early liminal sites.

It is worth reiterating that Bangkok saw the opportunity in the wandering Thammayut forest monks for expanding its sphere of influence in the frontier provinces. As one pupil of Man told me, at the impact points where the master stayed, not only *samnak song* but district administrative centres would in many cases appear (such as at Khoksiisuphaan district in Sakon Nakhorn). Man, the detached passive "frontiersman", would clear the path for the "civilized" Thai state, an attribute which has long been accorded Theravadin forest monks throughout Southeast Asia.

In 1937 Somdet Mahaawiirawong "Tisso Uwan" asked Ajaan Sao, the most senior Phra Kammathan monk, to establish a number of forest *samnak*



MAP 1  
Ajaan Man's "Luminary" Impact Points in the Northeast



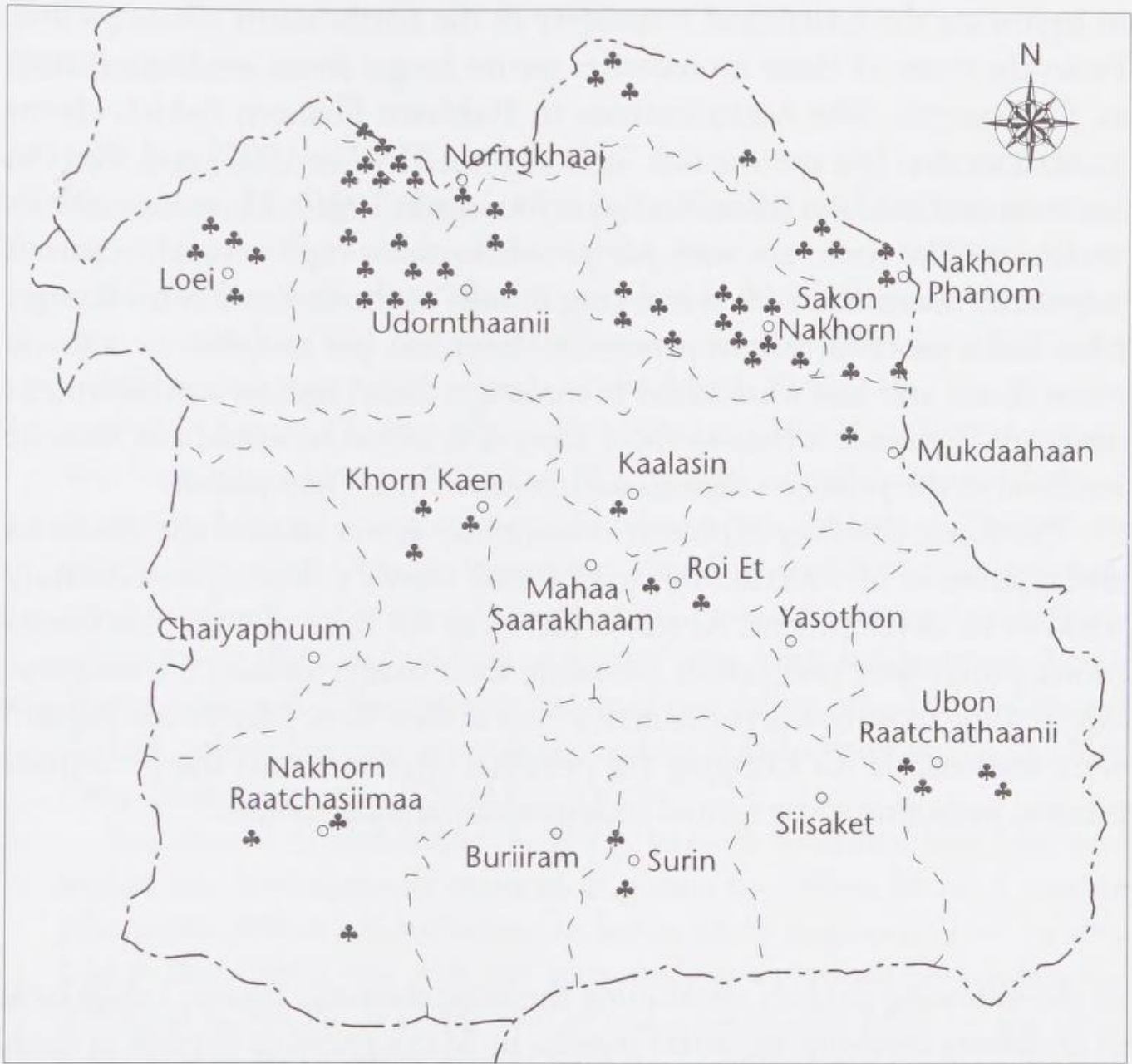
KEY

- (1) Phuuphaakuut, Baan Norngsuung, Kamcha'ii district (now in Mukdaahaan province)
- (2) Tham Phaabing, Wangsaphung district, Loei province
- (3) Baan Khor, Baanpheur district, Udon province
- (4) Thaabor district, Norngkhaai province
- (5) Tambon Nonglaat, Sawaang Daendin district, Sakon Nakhorn province
- (6) Wat Mahaachai, Norngbualamphuu district, Udon province
- (7) Baan Samphong, Thaa-uthen district, Nakhorn Phanom
- (8) Baan Norngkhorn, Hua Taphaan, Ubon province
- (9) Baan Paa Khok; Baan Paa Naamon and Baan Norngpheur, Phannaanikhom district, Sakon Nakhorn province
- (10) Baan Khongpor, "Huailuang", Pheng district (now Phen district), Udon province



MAP 2

The Northeast Region Showing Provincial Boundaries and Present Concentration of Forest Monasteries in the Lineage of Phra Ajaan Man



KEY

✕ Forest monasteries visited during field research, 1987-88

in Ubon and Kalasin. Sao, who had a detached “other-worldliness” about him, was quite unconcerned with establishing new monasteries but may have eventually acquiesced to formal authority. Many of the previously deserted monasteries and *samnak* where Sao stayed claim Sao as their founder. These monasteries became domesticated Thammayut *wat*. In Kalasin alone, there were twenty-six registered forest monasteries in seven districts established since the 1930s claiming affiliation to Man and Sao (*Phra Suthamkhanaajaan Ramleuk* [In memoriam to Phra Suthamkhanaajaan



(Daeng Thammarakkhitto)], 1988, pp. 43–44). Today, few — if any — of these are the residence of practising ascetic meditators.

During my field research Sao's name (and Man's) was used veraciously to legitimate the established monastery in the northeastern *dhutanga* line. Presently, many of these monasteries are no longer forest meditation sites, as, for example, Wat Aranyikaawaat in Nakhorn Phanom (which claims incorrectly that Sao was the first "abbot" from 1917 to 1927) and Wat Paa Saensamraan in Ubon (claiming Sao as founder in 1936). These monasteries and many like them are now *pariyat* institutions exploiting the current popularity associated with wandering monks in the Sao and Man lineage. Man had a more forthright personality than Sao (see endnote 1) and was more direct and not unabashed at making a stand against establishment demands. He made it clear to those around him that he would not become involved in the politico-religious aspirations of the Thammayut.

The forest-dwelling monastic community grows around the charisma and reputation of a meditation teacher and shows a distinct evolutionary trend in its development. As stated above, at the time of Man, his forest-monk pupils were peripatetic, following their master around the countryside, settling more or less permanently later in their lives. Many early pupils<sup>23</sup> were responsible for bringing his personal charisma into the provincial centres, including some formal ecclesiastical-ranking monks.<sup>24</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

In the following chapter, continuing the same thematic course, I shall look at problems confronting forest monks in Man's growing lineage at both the village interface and ecclesiastical centre. I shall also discuss the effects of the rapid proliferation of forest *samnakh* in the northeast, as well as religio-political discourse and interaction between Man's articulate former scholar-monks turned ascetic wandering pupils. As I shall show, despite the fact that early in his career Man faced a great deal of local opposition and disdain, he was eventually accepted (made possible through social and political alliances at the centre) and incorporated into the interiority of secular and religious orthodoxy. By the time of his death, there were few who did not believe Man to be an *arahan*, "the holiest man in living memory" (Keyes 1982, p. 160; see also the quotation by Mahaa Bua at the beginning of this chapter). Yet to fully appreciate the paradox surrounding Man's exclusion and then integration into normative institution forms, it is necessary



to situate him, and his lineage, within the totality of social and political configurations during the early decades of the twentieth century.

## NOTES

1. Like many reform monks of the time, Sao (1859–1941; born at Baan Khaakhom, Kheungnai district, Ubon) was formerly Mahaanikaai, reordaining at the same time as the well-known Bangkok administrative northeastern monk, Panyaaphisaanthen “Nuu” (mentioned in the last chapter). Nuu at that time was abbot of Wat Taai in Ubon. Sao was abbot of Wat Liap in Ubon for a time, a monastery which became established as Thammayut just after the turn of the century (Toem 1970, p. 632). Wat Liap, Wat Taai, Wat Buuraphaa, Wat Baan Khuu Meuang, Wat Baan Waang were among previously deserted or existing Mahaanikaai monasteries in Ubon which changed to Thammayut during this period (*Anusorn-ngaansedet Phra Raatchadamnoen Songprakorp-phithiitadluuk nimit Phuukphatthasiimaa ubosot lae songthethornglor-phraprathaan Wat Doi Mae Pang, Amphoe Phrao, Jangwat Chiangmai, 24–26 Kumphaaphan 2522* [In commemoration of establishing sanctified area around the convocation hall (*bot*) and making a golden Buddha image at Wat Doi Mae Pang, 24–26 February 1979], 1979, p. 33).

Sao seemed to have lacked the ability to teach compared with Man and had in any case reputedly resolved to pursue the “silent Buddha” (*pajjek phutthajao*) path to self-realization. In fact in Man’s biography (Thai version, Mahaa Bua 1986*a*) this wish had been made in a previous lifetime but was discarded in this life to enable him to attain *arahan’ship*. Man, on the other hand, had made an earlier wish to be at the same level as a teaching Buddha (*phutthaphuum*) which he also gave up (this concept will be returned to in a later chapter). Sao typifies the reclusive somewhat introverted loner. Man was recorded as saying that Sao’s gentle personality was an expression of great *mettaa*. He would only speak on occasions and with short pithy utterances. It is widely considered that some of Sao’s pupils, because they lacked firm discipline, were known to be arrogant and conceited.

In response to a question from one of his disciples as to whether Sao had attained *nippaan*, Man replied tersely that he attained that stage long before that monk was born (Mahaa Bua 1986*b*, pp. 283–84).

Although Man and Sao moved about together a great deal in the early days, they had their own distinctive lines and some monks today claim Sao as their teacher. Luang Puu Buaphaa Panyaaphaaso in Norngkhaai and



Phra Phaawanaaphisaanthen or Luang Puu Phut in Khoraat are two such monks. One of Buaphaa's nephews, Ajaan Mahaa Samaan, at the time of writing is teaching meditation in the United States and together with one or two other monks, plans to construct a Foundation for Ajaan Sao at Wat Paa Norng Sorng Horng in Norngkhaai (9.6 hectares of forest set aside for this purpose).

Sao was greatly influenced by his senior of four years, the earlier-mentioned Jao Khun Ubaalii, who taught him discipline and *dhamma*. There is no doubt that Sao was regarded at the time of Man as the most senior *kammathan* monk, and had it not been for his personality he would have surpassed Man in popularity. Sao reputedly died sitting in meditation at the *bot* of Wat Ammaat, Khwaeng Jampaasak in Laos on 3 February 1941. His body was taken to Wat Buuraphaa in Ubon for cremation (Thet, ed. 1986). On Sao, see article in *Lokthip* 27 (year 3, February 2527 [1984]): 8–43.

2. Man had a total of fifty-seven *phansaa*. The four phases of Man's monastic life can be summarized as follows:

#### *Phase 1 (1892–1915)*

Wat Liap in Ubon (with Ajaan Sao Kantasiilo); northeast/Lao wanderings; rains retreat at Wat Sapathum (Pathumwanaaraam) in Bangkok, his urban base; meeting with Jao Khun Ubaalii at Wat Boromniwaat (possibly the first to invite Man to the capital in 1914) (Mahaa Bua 1986a, p. 17); then Lopburii; Burma; Chiang Mai; Luang Phrabaang in Laos; Loei province; then Nakhorn Nayok (attaining *Anaakhaamii* or unwavering “insight” into the Buddha *dhamma* (ibid., pp. 35–36). In 1915 Man first decided to teach disciples.

#### *Phase 2 (1916–28)*

##### *Extensive wanderings in the northeast*

- |      |   |
|------|---|
| 1916 | Phuuphaakuut, Baan Norngsuung, Amphoe Khamcha'ii, Nakhorn Phanom province |
| 1917 | Baan Khongpor “Huai Luang”, Amphoe Pheng                                  |
| 1918 | Tham Phaabing, Loei province  |
| 1919 | Baan Khor, Amphoe Baan Pheur, Udonrthani                                  |
| 1920 | Amphoe Thaabor, Norngkhaai province                                       |
| 1921 | Baan Huaisai, Amphoe Khamcha'ii, Nakhorn Phanom                           |
| 1922 | Tambon Nonglaat, Amphoe Sawaang Daendin, Udonrthani                       |
| 1923 | Wat Mahaachai, Amphoe Norngbualamphu, Udon                                |
| 1924 | Baan Khor, Amphoe Baan Pheur, Udon  |
| 1925 | Amphoe Thaabor, Norngkhaai province                                       |
| 1926 | Baan Saamphong, Amphoe Thaa-uthen, Nakhorn Phanom                         |



1927 Baan Norngkhorn, Amphoe Bung (now known as Hua Taphaan), Ubon

1928 Bangkok, Wat Sapathum

*Phase 3 (1929–40)*

*Final attainment phase*

Extensive wanderings in the north (Chiang Mai province).

*Phase 4 (1940–49)*

*Return to the northeast, final nine years*

1942 Baan Khok forest, Sakon Nakhorn province

1943 Baan Naamon forest, Sakon Nakhorn

1944 Baan Khok forest, Sakon Nakhorn

1945–49 Baan Norngpheur, Tambon Naanai, Amphoe Phannaanikhom, Sakon Nakhorn province; Man died from tuberculosis at the age of eighty at Wat Paa Sutthaawaat in the town of Sakon Nakhorn

The above information is taken from various sources, primarily from the text *Nangseuphaap Chiiwaprawat Lae Patipathaa Phra Ajaan Fan Aajaro* (Yaanasiri et al. 1977, pp. 16–17).

3. *Samnak song* (the term first appeared in fourteenth century Sukhothai inscriptions to refer to a forest monastery) is a monastic centre not classified as *wat*, although in the forest tradition it is similar in general layout to a proper *wat* except without *siimaa* (Wachirayaan, *Winaimuk*, 1983, vol. 3, ch. 24, on establishing *siimaa*; see also Wachirayaan, *Kaankhanasong* [1971a, part 3] relating to royal *wisungkhaamasiimaa* (Pali: *visumgamasima*), the so-called “proper” monasteries). It is thus not possible in the Thai *sangha* to carry out higher *bhikkhu* ordination (Pali: *upasampada*) at these centres.

The establishment of the *Wisungkhaamasiimaa* is far simpler and preferred at forest monasteries who wish to carry out higher ordinations (*siimaa* stones or markers are placed around the vicinity of the *saalaa*). The ordinary *siimaa* is called the *Phatthasiimaa* and requires a complex ritual (Wijeyewardene 1986, pp. 91–119). The former needs only official sanction (brought by the District Officer) and needs no *bot*, although this may follow together with *Phatthasiimaa*. The *Wisungkhaamasiimaa*, as one monk explained to me, is not secure because officially the king (or more realistically his representative) can take back the land from the *samnak song*. On the other hand, *Phatthasiimaa* entails secure land rights (yet see Wells [1975, p. 28], who says that the *Phatthasiimaa* does not possess “formal deeds”).

The presence of a *bot* (and *Phatthasiimaa*) reflects the monastery’s status as a fully fledged religious institution. For details on the normative ceremonial



consecration of *siimaa*, see *Uposathakkhandaka* (*Mahavagga*, *Vinaya*, IV).

Tambiah (1984, p. 163) remarks that because of the status of most forest monasteries, they are outside “the channels and resources of the official *sangha*” but, correctly adds, not in any way illegitimate. Distinctions were in fact clearly drawn between *siimaa* and particular monastic classifications at the time of Wachirayaan (see the discussion in the previous chapter). Forest monasteries being placed outside the establishment *sangha* in the context discussed above may be to the liking of many forest teachers and part of charisma-“building”.

4. To mention a few important contemporaneous monk friends and associates of Man: Jao Khun Panyaaphisaanthen “Nuu”; Jao Khun Ubaalii “Jan Sirijantho”; Jao Khun Phra Thammajedii “Juum Panthulo”; Somdet Phra Mahaawiirawong “Phim Thammatharo”, Phra Khruu Udomthammakhun “Thongsuk Sujito”; Phra Thepworakhun “Um”; Phra Phrommunii “Phin Suwajo”; and Ariyakhunaathan “Seng”. This later high-ranking monk (whose writings I used in the previous chapter) eventually resigned his various administrative positions to practise meditation at Suan Kwaang mountain under the direction of Man. He had in his time written many books, the most well-known being *Thipaya-amnaat* [Supernatural power]. Towards the end of his life, however, he disrobed due to ill-health (*Phra Kammathan*, n.d., vol. 2, pp. 230–31).
5. Thamppiti (1987, pp. 120–21).
6. See Thet’s autobiography (1978) translated by Siri Buddhasukh, who also translated Man’s biography written by Mahaa Bua. This 1978 version was taken from the first edition in Thai (1960), then from the enlarged second (1974), and a modified third version.
7. Phim, resident at Wat Jedii Luang in 1937–40, was a supporter of Man (see endnote 3) and had an administrative teaching position at Wat Jedii Luang for three years. Phim was born in Ubon and ordained at Wat Supatanaaraam under his uncle Tisso in 1917. In 1941 he was appointed to be abbot of the important Wat Phrasiimahaathaat in Bangkok, predominantly a monastery for northeastern monks (Wat Isaan). Phim achieved *perian* Grade Six.
8. Since disrobed, now known as Thongkham Praphaan (Phakkamphuu village, Phannaanikhom district, Sakon Nakhorn). Thongkham, a Phuuthai, at the time of writing runs a general repair shop in the village and is still very active. Thongkham married a former “nun” in 1966 two years after he disrobed (at forty-three years of age). He has two daughters by his wife.

Thongkham told me that he disrobed largely out of confusion and fear during the communist insurgency at the beginning of the 1960s. Ajaan Ornsaa, Man’s early pupil from Wat Paa Baan Norng Yai, Udornthani, said



Thongkham disrobed simply to get married.

It took a long search to locate Thongkham, well-known as the main compiler of Man's early collection of sermons (*Muttothai*, see endnote 25, Chapter Five). Thongkham was eager to talk about his monastic life with Man and, because he was no longer bound by the social restraints of the monkhood, spoke freely and frankly. Thongkham was close to Man during the last five years of the teacher's life in the village of Norng Pheur (situated only a few kilometres away from where Thongkham now lives).

9. Thongkham (personal interview, January 1989) said that Man attained full *arahans'hip* in a Lopburii cave around the turn of the century and went to the north to "sharpen" his attainments. However, this seems to conflict with other accounts.
10. Phra Khruu Kittiworakhun "Thong-In", Wat Santitham, Chiang Mai.
11. Personal conversation with Jao Khun Thepsarawethii, monastic inmate at Wat Jedii Luang since 1928; *upatchaa* since 1949; Jao Khana Jangwat, Chiang Mai, Lamphuun and Lampaang (Thammayut) since 1951; Jao-aa-waat (abbot) since 1960; and Rong Jao Khana Phaak (regions 4, 5, 6, and 7 for the Thammayut) since 1979.
12. A more unlikely source mentioned two years. The variation in this regard shows the confusion among the differing accounts (biographies and informants).
13. Informant Phra Khruu Kittiworakhun, Wat Santitham, Chiang Mai, May 1988; also Thanissaro Bhikkhu, Wat Thamasathit, Rayong, a monk in the lineage of Lii Than Phor. This latter monk mentioned that Palat-ket was *maidaireung*, "unsuccessful" and far from impressive (personal communication, 1988).
14. Informant Phra Thepmethaajaan, abbot of Wat Phothisomphon in the town of Udornthaanii, a former fellow *pariyat* student with Mahaa Bua whilst studying together in Chiang Mai (May 1988).
15. Personal communication, 1988.
16. Kirsch (1967, p. 49) mentions that the nearby Phuuthai minority at Kamcha'ii district, Nakhorn Phanom, preferred to settle on higher terrain in isolated areas, thus ensuring separation from the ethnic Lao. This is also the case among the Yor in Phannaanikhom district, Sakon Nakhorn.
17. It will be argued that although symbolic of the polarity of worldly separation, an "ultramundaneity" (Dumont 1970, p. 43), forest monks are still an integral part of that social order in which they "flee" (situated at the periphery, but in the same cosmological design).
18. Suwan died at Wat Taai in Ubon some time between 1958 and 1959, and had a reputation since he was young — he was called *maa* (dog). As the story goes,



when Suwan was six months old his mother died and he had been suckled on a lactating dog. At some monasteries where he stayed a cult developed and villagers would leave models of dogs around the sacred shrine.

19. Oun was always moving about and tried unsuccessfully when he returned to his home district at fifty-six years of age to establish a *samnak* in Thaa-uthen district, Nakhorn Phanom. However, it was taken over by villagers after Oun's death when his pupils disappeared. It is now rice fields (information from local interviews in 1988).
20. Information on the development of Wat Aranyawaasii was obtained from Thet (ed. 1986) and interviews from local monastic inmates including the above-mentioned Phra Khruu Kittiworakhun Bunloet, the then acting abbot (Raksaakaan Jao-aa-waat).
21. *Acts on the Administration of the Buddhist Order of Sangha* (1963, pp. 1–37).
22. This is implicit in the biographical accounts of Man by Mahaa Bua (1986a) and Wiriyang (1980).
23. Some early disciples of Man include the following, some nationally famous in the 1960s and 1970s: Ajaans Fan, Jan Khemapatto, Kongmaa, Siiho, Orn, Teur, Chorp, Waen, Khreung, Mahaa Bua, Kwaa, Onsaa Sukkhakaamo, Kuu, Kirng, Saam, Thet, Chaa, Khao, Bua, Dii Phathiyo and Dii Channo, Suwan, Phaang, Rian, Sii, Lii, Sing, Bun, Ornsii, Bunmaa, Thongsaa, Wiriyang, among others. There were reputed to be about 800 monks claiming Man as their "teacher" (Wiriyang 1980).

Ajaan Thet Thetsarangsii (mentioned in the text), eighty-eight years of age (sixty-six *phansaa*) in 1990, is regarded as the most senior living disciple (in terms of rains period as a monk), although Mahaa Bua (who spent about nine years in total with Man) supposedly followed the master's "way" closest. Mahaa Bua gained authority through his biography on Man. He is referred to by many forest monks today as "Ajaan Yai" (the most important senior teacher in the tradition of Man). Thet, it would seem, is regarded by some forest monks as "outside" the core group of Man's pupils as he emphasized and encouraged his own disciples to study *nak tham* and had a number of disagreements with the master during the three years he was under his direction.

Ajaan Lui Janthasaaro (1901–89, mentioned in a later chapter), of Wat Tham Phaabing in Loei province, was like Thet, another senior disciple of Man and by some reckoning may have been more senior than Thet. Lui was born at *meuang* district, Loei and practised with other disciples of Man, Ajaans Chorp, Khao, and Orn, before going *thudong* to visit Man at Wat Aranyawaasii in Thaabor district, Norngkhaai.

24. The following list (taken largely from an article *Korngthaptham fai wipatsanaa*



[Army of meditation practitioners] in *Lokthip* (February 1984) identifies a number of Man's disciples and associates who pioneered the master's reputation in the various listed far provinces. Note that in some cases the same name appears in more than one province indicating some considerable mobility by these monks.

Region	Province	Northeastern Monks
East	Janthaburii	Lii, Kongmaa, Wiriayang, and Suwai
Northeast	Khoraat	Tisso Uwan, Ubaalii, Sing, Mahaa Pin "Panyaaphaalo", Orn, Kongmaa, Fan, Duun, Phrom, Kamtaa, Tongyuu, Phummii, Samraan
	Ubon	Sao, Dii, Bunsing, Fan "Paaretsako"
	Surin	Duun, Mahaa Chot, Noi, Saam
	Siisaket	Phummii
	Udorn	Phummii, Orn, Mahaa Bua
	Sakon Nakhorn	Fan, Kongmaa, Silaa, Waen "Thanpaalo", Horm, Thongkhun, Kwaa
	Norngkhaai	Nupuun, Laa, Jan "Khemapatto"
	Khorn Kaen	Sing, Mahaa Pin, Orn, Fan, Oun, Kirng, Silaa, Phummii, Kongmaa, Dii, Saamaa, Nin
	Kaalasin	Daeng
	Mahaasaarakhaam	Khun
	Roi Et	Siiho
	Loei	Khamdii, Chorp, Lui
North	Chiang Mai	Teur, Sim, Lui
	Lampaang	Waen "Thanpaalo"
Central	Nakhorn Sawan	Songchai
South	Phuket	Thet, Jan "khemasiri"



## CHAPTER FIVE

# *The Consolidation of a Northeastern Tradition*

Just as a clear-sighted man, standing on the river's bank or beside a tank and seeing the heavy rain pour down, thus concludes: "The bubbles rise and burst immediately," so also the Yogi [meditating *bhikkhu*] concludes that all complexes [conditioned being] in like manner are broken up. (Woodward 1970, p. 130)

During their initial wanderings, forest monks came into social conflict on two levels. One, as we have seen, with the Thammayut's administrators trying to manage and impress structural reform on the rural *sangha*; and secondly, by the local Mahaanikaai village *sangha*. It is in the latter regard that Man's regimen with its ascetic orientation towards a pragmatic, primitive meliorism led on a number of occasions to serious confrontation. Here, I wish to underscore that the ascetic monks were the complete antithesis of the socialized village monks attuned to the polyphony and vitality of the village community.

In the early twentieth century there were instructions from the centre to promote doctrinal Buddhism through Thammayut lines. In discouraging animist beliefs and practices prevalent in the countryside, forest monks would on many occasions find themselves in direct conflict with villagers (discussed later). As mentioned earlier, Ajaans Sao and Man were well-known teachers of normative *wipatsanaa*, as mystical gnosis, and became gradually recognized for their prowess by the Thammayut élite. A number of their pupils related the primacy of these two masters in teaching doctrinal practices to their pupils and villagers. Luang Puu Dii Channo (Wat Phuukhaokaew, Ubon), like many northeastern forest monks early in his monastic life sought



apprenticeship under a famous Lao monk mentioned in Chapter Three from Jampaasak known for his magical powers (*itthi-paatihaan*), named Samretlun. Then, after meeting with Man and Sao, Dii decided to discard his magical pursuits and follow the practice and discipline of the reformed forest way of life. Dii also tried to change the villagers' belief in magic and the spirit world (*naptheurphii*) through his *aphinihaan* and *kasin* (Pali: *kasina*, concentration powers accrued from this type of meditation). He then volunteered (*rap-aasaa*) to go to Phibuunmangsaahaan district in Ubon (Dii's home district) and promote doctrinal Buddhism to the rural people. Through his normative *kasin* powers he burnt spirit houses (*saanpuutaa*) and by his action even provoked an attempted murder organized by one irate village headman (I shall return to the implications for this response later).

Dii's account is not unusual, as many forest monk disciples of Man had early in their lives been greatly influenced by magical arts (seemingly flourishing at that time in Laos) and later, after meeting Man and Sao, reputedly using their magical powers for normative purposes. Man and Sao had unquestionably given the wandering way of life a new sense of respectability and affirmed its orthodox roots.

In another example, Luang Puu Khreung (Wat Thepsinghaan, Namsom district, Udorn) was also influenced early by Samretlun and subsequently changed after his meeting with Man. Khreung was born in 1867, three years older than Man but with seven less *phansaa*. When he was twenty-one years of age he ordained but disrobed after one year to marry, and had two children. He was a farmer and hunter; life was a constant struggle for survival and before long both his children died (mortality among new settlers up-country was high in those days) and a short while afterwards his wife died of a broken heart. Khreung then went off wandering aimlessly across the countryside. He reflected that his misfortune must have been because of his *kam* (Pali: *kamma*, the consequences of previous action), having in the past killed so many animals. Khreung then reordained at Wat Siisaket in Wiengjan when he was twenty-eight years of age. He studied magical arts (*saiyasaat*) under Samretlun, earning a reputation for his supranormal powers. Then during one of his wanderings in Laos he met Man and changed to practise orthodox meditation (*wipatsanaa-samatha*) for four years. He then continued wandering around the countryside teaching villagers and practising by himself until he was seventy-three years of age. He then returned to his home district in Udorn and died at the grand age of 113.

Luang Puu Dii Phathiyo (born in 1912), not to be confused with Dii



Channo above, from Wat Paa Himmaphaan, Kut-khaopun district in Ubon province, studied *aphinihaan* under another Lao magical arts specialist named Ket. After meeting Man and Sao, Dii decided to stay to learn orthodox meditation with assistance from his friend and senior, Ajaan Khreung. Since the age of twenty, Dii went wandering extensively to Kampuchea, Laos, and Burma, as well as to the north and throughout the northeast region. Like the other monks mentioned above, he was concerned with meticulous application of the *winai* and *thudong* regimen as endorsed by Man and Sao and in dispelling “superstitious” beliefs from what he regarded as “correct” religious practices.

Villagers were not always prepared to discard traditional beliefs and ritual practices and a great deal of mistrust arose when reform forest monks, encamped on the outskirts of the village, promoted a doctrinal soteriology which left little room for compromise. Ajaan Thet and his group, whilst in the far south in 1950 with the Thammayut’s support, were reputedly antagonized on numerous occasions. They were refused permission to stay at abandoned local monasteries and had to either build their own *samnak*, stay under their *klot* in the forest, or stay at the home of prominent lay supporters (mostly Siamese officials). At Phuket they once had their huts burnt, food poisoned, and were even stoned at the instigation of the local clergy and angry village leaders who also forbade the local people to proffer alms to those monks on alms-round (Thet 1978, pp. 190–91). It would appear that local leaders in Phuket resented the intrusion of these northeastern virtuosi (including also Ajaans Rian Waralaapho, Saam Akinjano, and Jan Khemasiri) largely because of associations with the hegemonic interests of the Siamese state and its élites. Thus the problem must be contextualized within the configuration of wider social and political issues, with the *sangha* often at the frontline of local conflicts.

A similar account of local aggression in the northeast was given by Ajaan Khamdii Paphaaso (1905–84) after he returned from teaching meditation to nearby villagers. In this instance two Phra Baan (village monks) threw stones at him, one of whom later died, the other became very sick (seemingly the workings of *kamma* according to Khamdii’s biographer, Ajaan Siithon 1985, p. 26). The biographer of Ajaan Saam Akinjano (Thammpit 1987, p. 125) related similar tales of local resentment and intimidation. Ajaan Sing Khantayaakhamo (1880–1961),<sup>1</sup> regarded as the most senior disciple of Man, whilst travelling in the northeast with his band of followers (including the well-known Ajaan Siiho, Wat Paa Wiwek-tham, Khorn Kaen, and Ajaan



Fan, Wat Paa Udom Somphorn, Sakon Nakhorn) on a number of occasions had his life threatened and was driven away from village precincts. This was in 1930, after Man had gone to the north, leaving Sing in charge of his growing band of pupils. In two accounts, Sing and Siiho had to use their miraculous powers of concentration (*itthirit*) to mollify rankled and irate villagers.<sup>2</sup> Whether these monks wished it or not, they found themselves caught between local regional concerns (ecclesiastical and secular) and centre-periphery political machinations.

Hostilities in the field were directly concerned with sectarian tensions sourced in the capital and diffused into the countryside, as well as in some cases jealousy between competing factions in the Thammayut itself. At this time, clerical administration up-country was starting to be divided into two distinct separate sectarian lines (the Thammayut and Mahaanikaai) in an attempt to ameliorate widespread discontent in the Greater Thai Sangha (*Phra Suthamkhanaajaan Ramleuk* [In memoriam to Phra Suthamkhanaajaan (Daeng Thammarakkhitto)], 1988, p. 32). Although the Mahaanikaai may be seen administratively as a totality (or simply all other monks except the smaller Thammayut), before the reforms they were not a unitary national body but consisted of disaggregated groups organized around localized teachers (Keyes 1987, p. 140). Hence the vast variation in ritual practice within the Mahaanikaai.

The administrative division in the *sangha* was given its final shape in the 1941 Sangha Act during the Seventh Jakrii reign. Up until this time the Thammayut could administer Mahaanikaai monks and thus tended to dominate *sangha* affairs, much to the chagrin of senior Mahaanikaai monks. Administrative tensions pertained to the control by one *nikaai* (and certain personalities) over affairs in another, as in the case of the position of ecclesiastical Monthon head (Jao Khana Monthon). In theory, the Jao Khana Monthon had token responsibility for all monks, *patibat* and *pariyat*, in both *nikaai* under his jurisdiction.

Thet's autobiography expresses an ambivalence felt by many between the roles of wandering ascetic (personal quest with teaching orthodox practices) and missionary for the Thammayut Nikaai (institutional promotion of national reform). As I shall argue later, while one may be considered overtly political, the other in its virtuosity and individualized mission may be completely non-political. In Thet's case, his life seems to have been an attempt to compromise between his interests in institutional reform and individualized practice; from establishing *nak tham* schools and founding



new Thammayut monasteries to a meditative life, detached and apolitical. Thet affirmed this ambiguity when he said that his Thammayut group in the south soon became well known and that many people were “willing to join” them in their “system of practice”. He goes on to say that the Thammayut had earlier tried to become established in the south but hitherto without success. The reason given was that there

had been previously no disciples of ... Mun [Man] coming there ... It is a record of both the Dhammayutti [Thammayut] and the island of Phuket that our group had established a number of permanent monasteries here, with the names of the Dhammayutti and our Meditation Master Phra Acharn Mun. (Thet 1978, p. 200)

As part of the seething resentment at the time, forest monks were rumoured to be “renegade” self-made saints not even performing the correct formal acts of the *sangha* (*sangkhakam*) (Thet 1978, p. 192). Complaints about Thet’s group when they first went to the south were made to local ecclesiastical heads and the Department of Religious Affairs, accusing them of being “vagabonds” causing “disunity” and “unrest” (ibid., p. 193). The local Mahaanikaai *sangha* were not impressed and tried to find justification to disparage and counterminimize what they saw as a potential threat to their own authority. Ariyakhunaathan (1933, p. 42) tells us that in general, everywhere Thammayut monks went and established new monasteries, there were “obstructions” (*upasak*) from both the local laity and monks resisting changes to the existing monastic structure and village order.

### DOCTRINE, MISSIONARIES, AND DEMONS

Forest monks were criticized until recent times by *pariyat* monks (of both *nikaai*) for their lack of knowledge on standard Pali chanting (*kaansuatmon*; see also Chapter Three). Although they tended to give much less emphasis to ritual interaction with the laity (requiring a corpus of standard chants for various functions), forest monks were meticulous in the performance of normative *sangha* rituals. Many also memorized certain *sutta*, such as “protective chants” (*suatphraparit*; Pali: *paritta*) found to be useful when alone in the forest. Ajaan Khao Anaalayo used to recite these Pali chants for hours in the forest. Precision and correct intonation has long been stressed by Ajaan Mahaa Bua, who used to get his disciples to repeat many times during *ubosot* if they pronounced a word incorrectly. In Ajaan Wan Uttamo’s biography



(1981, p. 6), Ajaan Sao apparently got his novices before nineteen years of age to recite the *paatimok* (Pali: *patimokkha*) complete, otherwise if they wished to go and pursue *nak tham* studies he would not allow them.

The *paatimok* takes from fifty to sixty minutes to recite with celerity and precision from memory, a feat few monks outside select urban and forest monasteries are capable today (compare this with Tambiah's [1970, p. 372] comments on the apparent relevance of the *paatimok* to village monks in the early 1960s). Ajaan Wan himself said that as a young monk he had to recite the *paatimok* for twenty days before receiving permission from Sao to go to Ubon for further studies. In a Durkheimian sense, the *paatimok* is the most important *sangha* solidarity ritual, crucial in a communal function as one of the real elements that binds the *sangha* together. In general, each *paatimok* ceremony was the pronouncement of purity of a particular *sangha* (that is, a group of four or more monks) and ensured the restoration of face-to-face relations (Gombrich 1988, p. 110).

Ajaan Wan Uttamo (see also Chapter Nine), as with many other forest monks, soon became bored with *pariyat* pursuits and instead turned to the meditative life, although in doing so did not discard the centrality of normative *sangha* rituals. Thus, as these above examples show, criticism of forest monks in regard to orthopraxy (the correct performance of *sangkhakam* rituals) was largely unfounded.

Ajaan Sing's small booklet, *Traisaranakhom lae samaathiwithii* [The Triple Gem and techniques of meditation], which first appeared in 1936 was perhaps the first widely distributed manual on meditation written by a northeastern Phra Kammathan meditation master. Its impact on northeastern monks and some literate lay readers was impressive. The second part of the text, dealing specifically with the method of practice, was written by Sing initially at the request of an Assistant District Officer in Khorn Kaen province. At that time Sing and his group were instructing the laity and monks on meditation practice, and helping to establish a number of forest *samnak* in various districts. In the preface to the text (translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu), Sing mentions the need for "rectifying the mind" through consistent application of meditation which had

fallen into disuse for so long that students of Buddhism have been misled into believing that its time is past, that the time for the transcendent paths (*mak*) and fruitions (*phon*) is over.

The first part of the manual deals with the ritual procedure of "seeking



refuge" in the Buddha, *dhamma*, and *sangha* (*Traisaranakhom*) and thus laying a clear and explicit basis for the second part dealing with the meditation practice. The first 3,000 copies of this text were eagerly snatched up by interested monks and lay followers of Sing.

Today many elderly forest monks mention the influence Sing's manual had on their practice. The well-known Ajaan Rian Waralaapho stated that when he was first given this text by his father in the late 1930s it changed the course of his monastic career. As we will see later in this chapter, the text also had a profound effect on Ajaan Daeng Thammarakkhito and was handed to him by Man's wandering pupil, Ajaan Kongmaa Jirapunyo (1900–62).<sup>3</sup>

Even Man had been impressed with Sing and, according to one account, ordered his senior pupil to mobilize monks and novices into a "*dhamma* Army" (*korngthaptham*) to promote doctrinal Buddhism around the countryside, starting at Khorn Kaen (though as I shall show in Chapter Seven, Man himself was not keen on direct involvement in preaching to villagers). The centre for the "*dhamma* frontiersmen" was a cemetery on the fringe of the town (Baan Lao-ngaa, now incorporated into the *meuang* and known as Wat Paa Wiwektham, is no longer the residence for ascetic practitioners). The purpose of Man's *dhamma* missionaries was to instil into villagers orthopraxy, the core elements of the Buddha's teachings through direct gnosis or self-realization. Phra Ubaalii, confirming Man's doctrinal stance, when giving a sermon in Chiang Mai told his audience not to trouble Man (after he arrived) with superstition and magic as he will be displeased. Man, we are told, "preaches and practices only the dharma of the Buddha and will not lead people astray" (Mahaa Bua 1982, pp. 108–9).

Whilst Man and his disciples may have been missionaries of the *dhamma*, it would appear generally that they were not so much concerned with the institutional ambitions of the Thammayut, except in those instances where personal and institutional interests coalesced. As we have seen, although embodying much of Mongkut and Wachirayaan's doctrinal reform, the teaching mode and life-style of Man's forest monks were not to the liking of the administration with their embedded prejudices towards wandering forest monks. But in line with reformist orientations, Man's pupils were active in discrediting popular animistic beliefs and practices prevalent in the northeastern countryside. In Man's biography (Mahaa Bua, *The Venerable Phra Acharn Mun Bhuridatta: Meditation Master*, 1982) it is stated that during this time the northeast was "ruled over by ghosts, spirits and demons"



(ibid., p. 52). Also that Man and Sao had

instructed and awakened them [the people of the northeast] to the truth of Buddhism ... [eventually] people became convinced of the truth and came to accept the Triple Gem ... this is the heritage both Venerable Acharns bequeathed to the people of the northeast, and, in most parts, is still preserved today.

Further, we are told that “a person wandering in that region today will hardly ever tread on the oblations offered to the spirits” which, in earlier times was noticeable throughout the countryside. Thus, “in this respect the Northeast may be said to have been liberated from the spirits’ yoke through ... the Venerable Acharns [Man and Sao]” (ibid., p. 53).

One point needs to be mentioned here and that is, in the original (1971) Thai version of Man’s biography, Mahaa Bua does not emphasize directly (as in Siri’s translation) the master’s concern with broad politico-religious reform and apostatization. The original text discusses a situation whereby Man was intensely concerned about his own practice and those of his students, although we are occasionally told that villagers would sometimes seek instruction in the normative practice and as a consequence amend their traditional beliefs and practices.

Ajaan Lii Thammatharo (1906–61; better known as Than Phor Lii), another famous pupil of Man who reordained in the Thammayut at the same time as the above-mentioned Ajaan Kongmaa, recounted similar experiences of hostilities at the village interface. Whilst staying with his early teacher (Ajaan Bot, a disciple of Man) in a forest near his home village in Ubon he was told to leave by the local community. As discussed above, it appeared that the problem concerned his mode of teaching and disparaging, disdainful remarks in his sermons on popular animistic beliefs. This was combined with his single-minded purpose of teaching doctrinal Buddhism and missionary fervour. He was seen as something of a religious miscreant, a wandering vagrant (*Phra Jorajat*), causing unrest among the village community (Phanatsabodii 1987, p. 67). Lii mentions in his autobiography (translated by Thanissaro Bhikkhu),

I taught the people in the village to take refuge in the Buddha, *dhamma* and *sangha*, to recite Buddhist chants and to meditate, instead of getting involved with spirits and demons. (Lii n.d. [b], p. 8)

Thet (1978, p. 94) mentions that in 1929 the government issued a



“prohibition announcement” against the widespread popular belief in the “power of ghosts and demons”, promoting instead adherence to the “Triple Gem”. Whilst I can find no official records to substantiate this comment, it fully accords with official attitudes at the time. It would seem that many of the wandering pupils of Man, especially Ajaan Sing and his sub-lineage, were sanctioned by the provincial government to carry out what Thet (1978) refers to as an “exorcism” campaign (*ibid.*, p. 95).

There are historical antecedents for religious rectification or purification such as in sixteenth century Laos, when King Phothisarath issued a royal decree forbidding his people to worship spirits. In this instance, not much different from the more recent example below, the

shrines, altars and others built for any such worship were destroyed and Buddhist temples and shrines were built in their places. (Viravong 1964, p. 50)

In Lii’s apparent zeal to apostatize, he actively encouraged (as did Ajaan Dii, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter) the burning of ancestral shrines and “ritual objects used for worshipping spirits”. The intensity of the campaign was such that some days Lii noted, “there’d be nothing but smoke all day long” (*ibid.*, p. 8). The villagers were left with a sense of vulnerability, a helplessness against the unseen indigenous malevolent forces without efficacious protective powers. Lii, as did other monks, realized this and in place handed out inscribed Pali chants reassuring the villagers that they would be safe with this universal remedy.

In Khorat (Nakhon Raatchasiima), the Chokchai District Officer requested Ajaan Sing to send pupils to instruct the villagers in normative doctrine. However, the local clergy were not pleased and incited a mentally unsound villager to attack one of the forest monks with a scythe. The matter was resolved without bloodshed by the local Chief of Police (named Luang Jaan Nikhom), a keen supporter of Ajaan Sing and his younger brother Mahaa Pin (I shall return to this monk later). In fact the Chief of Police supported the first Thammayut forest *samnak* in Khorat in 1932/33 by donating an orchard nearby the new railway station on the outskirts of the town of Khorat. This *samnak* became known as Wat Paa Saalawan and, as mentioned earlier, was an important centre for the expansionary Thammayut-tikaa. Ajaan Man’s pupil from Surin province mentioned earlier, Ajaan Saam Akinjano (Wat Paa Traiwiwek), was asked by Sing to come and help establish the forest *samnak*.



Despite early suspicion of the wanderers by the villagers and some local officials, many were determined to prove their salutary worth, as with Lii, and become accepted. By the beginning of the 1930s official attitudes were changing for the better for the wandering forest practitioners. Lii gave an example in his autobiography when he first stayed at a local cemetery in Janthaburii (later to be known as Wat Paa Khlornng Kung, the “Shrimp Canal Forest Monastery”). Some of the local laity accused him of being a “fraud” and went to the see the Phra Sangkharaat, the Thammayut “Supreme Patriarch”, Chinawonsiriwat at Wat Bowonniwet. The Sangkharaat then sent a letter to the ecclesiastical provincial head (Jao Khana Jangwat) asking him to investigate the matter. Lii then sent details of his personal identification papers (*bai sutthi*) to the Sangkharaat, who replied that he would come in person after the rains retreat. On Lii’s *bai sutthi*, it would be stated that his *upatchaa* was the famous Jao Khun Panyaaphisaanthen “Nuu”, friend and teacher of Wachirayaan, and thus from an unimpeachable ordination tradition. The outcome was that the Sangkharaat gave his consent saying that since there were many local supporters (note conditions embedded in the 1902 Sangha Act discussed in the previous chapter for setting up new *samnak song*), he could see no problem. Lii then asked the royal Sangkharaat to give a sermon before he left, but the latter declined, saying that he had never practised meditation before and therefore it would be inappropriate. Finally, the Sangkharaat panegyrically remarked that practice monks like Lii “are hard to find” (Lii n.d. [b], p. 40).

Lii, as with other forest monks in the lineage of Ajaan Man, by the latter part of their wandering lives had substantial support from central government officials in their campaign to promote reformed interpretation of the doctrine and improve the standard of monastic practice throughout the countryside. As mentioned earlier, Man as with his early pupils had strong support from elite urban laity, including the royalty. But in some parts of the countryside resentment was so incisive that wandering monks were forced to move on. Except for formative forest *samnak*, the Thammayut were only entrenched within the confines of selected *meuang*, further into the countryside the village with its ubiquitous local Mahaanikaai *sangha* predominated.

In fact the village *sangha* were ill-disciplined, participated in gambling, drinking alcohol, and smoking opium (*fin*), playing with girls and eating whenever they liked. Brodrick (n.d., pp. 98–99), comparing Khmer and Laotian monks before World War II, noted that the latter were less disciplined, more “sacerdotal than monastic” and normally involved in



“performing efficacious and quasi-magical ceremonies”. As mentioned in an earlier chapter, Jao Khun Ubaalii noted this in his report to Wachirayaan in the 1920s (Mongkut was of course aware of this even before Wachirayaan). The behaviour of the local *sangha* was the cause for many reform-minded northeastern monks to reordain in the Thammayut (see also Chapter Nine), and for Man’s pupils to become attracted to the eremitic life under the master’s discipline.

The earlier-mentioned Ajaan Kongmaa noted with disgust the “loose practice” (*yornyaan tor khorwatpatibat*) of the village Mahaanikaai monks, and a reason for his seeking reordination some two years after meeting with Man. Ajaan Lii had the following to say about his life as a village Mahaanikaai monk:

the life I and the monks around me were leading made me feel ill at ease, because instead of observing the duties of the contemplative life, we were out to have a good time, playing draughts, wrestling, playing match games with girls ... raising birds, holding cock fights, sometimes even eating food in the evenings. (n.d. [b], p. 3)

Lii, as will be shown later, wanted to reordain in the reform *nikaai* partly as he said, to make a clean break with the past, as an act of ritual purification. I should add that the disreputable, even nefarious reputation of the up-country *sangha* is as alive today as in pre-World War II Siam.

In one of Wachirayaan’s summary reports to Chulalongkorn, he mentions that Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa presented a particular problem for *sangha* reforms. He notes “distortions” (*fanfeuan*) in the monks’ discipline (*Thamwinai*) similar to that observed by Ubaalii in the far northwest (see Chapter Three), a different mode of chanting and manner of dress (even wearing *muak tumpii* or headgear showing monastic rank) compared with the central Thai monks. The local *sangha* in this *monthon* consisted largely of Lao and Kampuchean monks, with an anomalous and aberrant method of conferring higher ordination (Wachirayaan 1971c, pp. 60, 312–13). It should be noted also that the monk education-director for Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa, Phra Raatchakawii, prohibited local monks from buying “goods” at the market (*ibid.*, p. 116).

An interesting letter sent to Wachirayaan (1971d, pp. 64–70) by Tisso in 1913 shows clearly the conditions in the northeastern *monthon* Roi Et, where Tisso was head at the time. This letter is important in that it shows Wachirayaan’s apparent understanding and compromising position, and at



the same time Tisso's obdurate and punctilious attitude towards monastic discipline. Tisso wrote on a number of problems: first, he reported dismissing eight inefficient Jao Khana Khwaeng and administrative monks (Phra Khruu Sanyaabat category); second, Tisso mentions that he forbade monks to cut grass; third, he set new rules for ordination procedure; fourth, he complained about the lack of cleanliness and demeanour among monastic inmates under his jurisdiction; fifth, he tried to prevent the consumption of alcohol and opium among local monks and eating after mid-day; sixth, he wanted to enforce the regulation whereby misbehaved monks could be disrobed by the Jao Khana Monthon and last, he wanted to know how to incorporate the traditional Lao water ritual of *Hot Phra* (discussed in a later chapter) into the reform discipline.

Wachirayaan replied that he should be tactful and implement the new reforms gradually. It should be remembered that Tisso was one of the pioneer northeastern Thammayut monks given the formidable responsibility of bringing about changes among the rural clergy. On the points raised in Tisso's letter, Wachirayaan suggested firstly that in future he should only replace inefficient monks after consulting with him first (no doubt considering also the likely repercussions from such action). Wachirayaan went on to say that if monks were too old to carry out their duties, they should be given an honorary rank before being replaced by new administrators. On the issue of cutting grass (a breach of the monks' discipline), this was only a minor default, and priority should instead be given to the upkeep of the *bot* and *kuti*. In fact, Wachirayaan said that forbidding rural monks from cutting the grass would only make them more idle. On the personal behaviour of the local *sangha*, Wachirayaan suggested that Tisso should not compare them to monks in the capital, as they do not have the same sense of propriety and in any case even some city monks have "smelly robes". In the ordination procedure (which Wachirayaan meticulously emended and followed today) Tisso should simply follow the procedure set down in Wachirayaan's standard text, *Kaankhanasong* (1971a, vol. 1, part 4).

The Roi Et governor had wanted intending applicants for ordination to first seek approval from the abbot of the local monastery before obtaining clearance from the District Office. This was passing responsibility on to the monastery heads and Tisso asked Wachirayaan what he should do. The reply was that he should follow the established procedure set by Bangkok. On the issue of having an afternoon meal, Wachirayaan said this was preferable to taking addictive drugs — a problem which could lead to both personal and



communal problems. If the local community do not see eating in the afternoon as a problem, then Tisso should go along with this practice. Regarding forced disrobing of monks solely through the Jao Khana Monthon, Wachirayaan suggested that the ecclesiastical district head, or Jao Khana Khwaeng (see *sangha* hierarchy outlined in Chapter Three), could perform this task on monks with only a few *phansaa*, but with more senior monks this must be the duty of the Jao Khana Monthon. In this matter, Tisso was advised to refer to instructions outlined in the Department of Religious Affairs gazette *Talaengkaan-khanasong* (vol. 1, part 2, p. 98, part 3, p. 109).

Wachirayaan's summary report to the king concerned the loose disciplinary behaviour of monks up-country, their habit and preoccupation with traditional modes of chanting, and disinterest in either study or meditation. On a more positive note, he remarked, however, that serious drug and alcohol addictive problems which had long plagued the rural *sangha* were not many (Wachirayaan 1971*b*, p. 30).

I have discussed at some length the communication between Wachirayaan and Tisso, as Jao Khana Monthon Roi Et, to stress the normative authority of Wachirayaan (referring to his own texts as attestation), the problems encountered in implementing doctrinal reform in the countryside and the infrangible determination of Tisso to perform his proper role in a northeastern *monthon*. As I shall show later, Tisso created considerable administrative problems for the wandering ascetic monks until, incredibly, he changed to become one of Man's disciples' most articulate and faithful supporters.

Eventual support for Man and his disciples by influential monks (like Tisso) and government officials in the new bureaucracy may have been largely because of similar doctrinal interpretations given by both the urban reformers and these forest monks (as a derivation and product of the reforms, which in its effects were far-reaching and covered both the secular and religious domains). Doctrinal teachings had the backing of the educated urban élite and were supported through bureaucratic channels. Forest monks correctly ordained in the Thammayut (with its normative praxis) by leading early reform monks could not be hastily disregarded. Yet dislike and suspicion of forest monks abounded and wanderers — especially in large groups — were frequently asked to move on by local government officials (ostensibly compelled to act on complaints received from villagers and the local clergy). In essence, forest monks were disliked because of their “homelessness”, relative austerity, and even enthusiasm for their somewhat “permanent



liminal state” on the fringes and interstices of society (see Turner [1969, p. 145], in relation to the early eremitical Franciscans).

Many tales emphasize the sense of separation, exclusion, and distance when wandering monks pass through the village on their way to distant forest monasteries or perhaps take up temporary residence at local cemeteries. Man’s biography mentions the apprehension of villagers when they saw *thudong* monks, hiding inside their houses and avoiding any contact with them. But of course in those days villagers had very little contact with the outside world, and rarely ventured far from the village because of the risks and difficulties in travelling. According to one of Man’s disciples, the master was called *sua yen*, “the cool tiger”, by some northeastern villagers because of the suspicion and fear towards him, possibly as some kind of trickster, or *agent provocateur* for the state. A number of informants said that when Man was travelling in the countryside, villagers would view him with trepidation, often turning fear into hostility. Then again, he was also accused, as his disciples were on occasions, of being Phra Jorajat or a wandering vagrant by the ecclesia and local leaders. Although Man had a small coterie of urban lay followers — towns which had felt the resonance of his reputation from rural settlements — there was still some antipathy when he passed through these rural centres.

The villagers and, perhaps more importantly, the local clergy, perceived the wandering forest monks as a potential threat to the security and established familiar order of the village with its relatively discrete bounded world. In effect the wandering ascetics had infringed on the covetous parochial domain of the local *sangha* who resented competition or outside interference. In fact there are two dimensions to this problem: Firstly, the forest and those few monastic eremites who coexist in the forest are regarded as being at the very fringe and terminus of human habitation, predictability, and stability (I shall return to this in detail in Chapter Eight); forest wanderers were thus feared and treated with respectful distance. Secondly, forest monks in many instances were considered to be evangelizing ideologues or missionaries for the Siamese Government — as in the expansion of the Thammayut and encroachment on traditional Mahaanikaai territory.<sup>4</sup> In this latter respect they were not only feared, but occasionally also despised.

#### FOREST MONKS ON THE “INSIDE” AND “OUTSIDE”

During the latter part of Man’s life, and especially after his demise, most of his early pupils settle in their own parent *samnak* in an institutionalizing



phase. Then, with the increasing popularity of a teacher, more pupils come to seek instruction at the parent monastic residence and expansion may occur (although this has not always happened). A hiving process takes place not unlike the development of so-called *muubaan-faak* or *baan noi*, satellite villages in the northeast. This leads to the creation of affiliative *samnak* or *wat saakhaa* (branch monasteries) controlled and regulated by the teacher or his senior disciples (second generation from Man).

In time it may happen that these second-generation forest monks gain a reputation as meditation teachers in their own right, creating new pupillary cells (though much depends on the teacher's intent and purpose). In fact this occurred extensively over the past twenty years, with pupillary networks transversing the countryside. It should be added that as these *samnak* and *wat* were perceived to be regulated by tight administrative control connected linearly to the capital they were not considered a threat to the establishment, but more so to local institutions (see the discussion below on Man).

Ajaan Chaa Suphattho (Wat Nong Paa Phong, Ubon) at the time of writing has over eighty branch monasteries, predominantly in the provinces of Ubon, Nakhorn Phanom, and Khorat; some now with their own highly respected teachers.<sup>5</sup> The late Ajaan Duun Atulo (Wat Buuraphaaraam, Surin) — another first-generation pupil of Man — also has over eighty affiliated branch monasteries; Ajaan Sii Mahaawiuro (Wat Paa Kung, Roi Et) has about sixty-three; the line of Ajaan Mahaa Pin (Wat Paa Satthaaruam, Khorat) has fifty; Ajaan Saam, Ajaan Mahaa Phut, and Ajaan Jan Khemiyo have each about fifteen to seventeen branch monasteries, and so on. But it is difficult to estimate the precise number of branch monasteries, as in the case of Ajaan Thet (claiming only five *wat saakhaa* but with many hundreds of disciples throughout the country) due to the dispersion and settlement of forest monks. Thus, as with Thet, the number of apparent branch *samnak* does not necessarily correspond to the popularity of a teacher or the number of his disciples.

Some monks may claim affiliation to more than one teacher, particularly these days when active forest meditation masters are few and far between. Practising monks themselves who are still fairly mobile may not necessarily reside for long at monasteries affiliated to their teacher (after their “apprenticeship” period mentioned in an earlier chapter). Kirsch, working among the Phuuthai in the 1960s, mentioned the presence of a Thammayut forest monastery near his village in Kamcha’ii district Nakhorn Phanom. He noted that, in comparison to the village monastery, there was a high degree



of mobility with monks coming and going all the time. The abbot of the forest monastery had resided previously at ten forest monasteries. Indeed, among forest monks there is a fluidity and mutability which makes it not always possible to attach neat permanent affiliative categories. At some forest *samnak* there may be monks temporarily resident from various parent monasteries in the northeast, from various teachers in the line of Ajaan Man. Then again, the collective sodality at a *samnak* depends on the most senior monk, the monastic teacher. Because the forest tradition is still significantly a wayfaring mode of life, with monks tending to move about from *samnak* to *samnak* (outside the rains retreat), formal affiliation can only be reckoned through recognition given by the parent monastery (not necessarily by the constitution of monastic inmates who may be in passing).

The hiving process mentioned above may also be an outcome of the increasing encroachment by the outside world, population pressure, as with the proliferation of new settlements and cleared rice lands. These factors (discussed in a later chapter) effectively impel recluse monks further into the remaining isolated pockets of the peripheral forests and mountains.

In these relatively isolated fringes, there have been numerous *wat saakhaa* set up over the years by Man's early and later pupils. In turn these become established parent bases. This is the phase already mentioned whereby second-generation (and even third-generation) teachers create their own pupillary networks, as relatively short-lived segmentary lines. Each line has its own stem affiliates (as with Man's first group of disciples) which function mainly as places for intensive retreat. Often third-generation teachers in the line of Man head these small *samnak* or *wat saakhaa* of second-generation pupils. Suffice to say, there are pragmatic reasons for this seemingly complex configuration of monasteries and teachers entrenched in the evolution and growth of forest *samnak* correlated with the growing popularity of a teacher, and the spoiling of the parent monastery. As a consequence, practice monks opt to wander off from these busy centres to the seclusion of smaller and more isolated *samnak*. In the days of Ajaan Man, the main problem related to bureaucratic obstructions as, in contrast to more recent times, there were plenty of forests in which to disappear from time to time.<sup>6</sup> The social, economic, and political scenario over the last twenty to thirty years has irrevocably changed the face of the forest monk tradition, but I shall return to this in a later chapter on contemporary life.

For the greater part of Man's life the Thammayut hierarchy viewed him with some antipathy and suspicion. As I have already suggested, the central



ecclesia during this period was concerned about the fragmented and ramified national *sangha* and sought to regulate monks and informal lineages in the countryside which tended to evade these controls (Somboon 1982, p. 29). Monks in effect needed monastic affiliation (though not a problem for Man's lineage as mentioned earlier) otherwise they would no longer be recognized and risk being tagged as Phra Jorajat, arrested, and forced to disrobe (Wachirayaan 1971a, p. 60). As a source of pure charismatic authority, in a Weberian (1968, p. 51) sense, forest teachers were seen to be opposed to "rational", especially regulated, bureaucratic leadership. Forest monks preferred moving about in small face-to-face groups, under the guidance of either the teacher or senior disciple. Routinized authority tended to be founded in formal monastic institutions and hierarchy, where forest monks preferred to remain peripheral. As a consequence ecclesiastical authorities were clearly unsure at times on how to deal with popular local charismatic individuals such as Man, and for that matter the better-documented case of Khruubaa Siwichai and his lineage in the north.<sup>7</sup>

Some of the factors which were responsible for bringing about a unified *sangha* throughout the country include the establishment of royal monasteries (*Wat Luang* or *Phra Aaraam Luang*) pertaining to both *nikaai*, a clerical system of titles or *sangha* hierarchical structure; monastic education regulated from the capital; and formal control over higher (*upasampada*) ordination (Tambiah 1984, pp. 162–63). At the same time the *sangha* authorities, consisting largely of Thammayut monks, encouraged the growth of conventional forest monasteries in the far provinces while simultaneously seeking to undermine local oppositional bases of charisma and ideology.

An important reason for the mistrust of forest monks by the administration and *sangha* bureaucracy according to O'Connor (1978), relates to the widely held belief in their magical powers. This could also include the assumed cultivation of magical skills (*saiyasaat*) through manipulating the powers of nature and likely pernicious effects (perhaps as mystical artifice) on the new structured social order. In fact the linking of forest monks with apotropaic (production of charms and amulets), mediumship, propitiatory, and other mystical abilities sprang from the well-head of popular religiosity and conflicted with the new emphasis on doctrinal orthopraxy. Ajaan Man tried to disassociate monastic forest dwelling (seemingly fallen into disrepute) from these indigenous associations. At the same time whilst "no one denied that true forest monks had *aphinihan*", the problem arose due to the "many seeming impostors" (O'Connor 1980, p. 35) and confusion for lay and



*sangha* élite unable to draw the line between “real forest monk” and wandering impostors.

Thus it may have been difficult to differentiate between “true” forest monk and wandering “magician” for which the Lao-speaking provinces were famous. In the eyes of the scriptural Thammayut movement, any assumed linkage with practices considered non-normative, such as curing, protection, and divination, were abhorred. The reform movement tried to eliminate for the first time magical practices embedded in its traditional cosmology. Many informants asserted that prior to the Thammayut reforms there were no practice monks in the doctrinal tradition, only miscreant forest dwellers intent on accruing supranormal skills. As I have shown, in the case of Sao and Man, some of their pupils were heavily influenced by popular theurgy until meeting these two normative meditation masters. Man and Sao in turn were significantly influenced by the Siamese reforms.

The Siamese administrative and doctrinal orthodoxy was contraposed to the traditional wandering regimen with its “magical” associations. Perhaps the problem can also be seen in terms of an incompatibility between a new urban élite trained in a rationalist nineteenth century Victorian world-view (Zack 1977, p. 231), at variance with a “mystical” indigenous tradition. This is clear from Wachirayaan and Damrong’s writings, as well as their patriotic contemporaries. Even the 1902 Sangha Act has to be seen largely in terms of Chulalongkorn’s efforts to mould Siamese society in accord with the model of the European nation-state (Keyes 1987, p. 140). In general we may say that the new “rational” bureaucratic machinery was hostile to forest monks (even those formally ordained in the Thammayut) because they were perceived to be outside its governance and not easily regulated under its streamlined infrastructure. As well, there was always the likelihood of correctly ordained forest monks being persecuted as wandering vagrants or, as so-called “alien monks”, monks from neighbouring countries, Phra Taangdao.<sup>8</sup>

In 1914 Wachirayaan on an inspection tour of the *sangha* addressed an aberrant undisciplined group of wandering monks encamped at the Saraburii shrine (a pilgrimage site of the Buddha’s footprint). Importantly, he mentioned that with correct *winai* and practice they could gain great merit and at the same time earn appropriate respect from the laity (Zack 1977, p. 219). He also criticized the fact that they were not affiliated to a permanent monastery, a serious problem for the reformers as they considered these monks to be not capable of being supervised properly, thus raising doubts



about their status. Wachirayaan then distributed copies of his normative meditation manual “Essentials of Meditation Practice” (ibid., p. 220). These were the wandering monks which had caught Carl Bock’s (1986, p. 105) attention during the full moon of the third month (February) in the late nineteenth century. Many years before Wachirayaan’s recorded visit to the Saraburii shrine, in correspondence with the king, he had deplored the fact that there were few standard normative religious texts available up-country to inspire monks and novices in correct practice.

In general, connected to the problem of isolation, Wachirayaan’s *sangha* inspection tours showed how little the ruling élite knew of real conditions in the countryside. They had to depend solely on information transmitted by administrative monks. There was also a gap separating provincial centres from outlying fever-ridden districts “supposed to be under their direct administration” (Zack 1977, p. 164). Although Wachirayaan managed to get to the north, his personal inspection tours did not include the present-day Northeastern Region (ibid., p. 168).

In the case of Ajaan Man, it was not until he and his disciples had established their orthodoxy or orthopraxy through personal links in a direct line to the capital (O’Connor 1980, p. 36) that the Thammayut gave its approbation. Forest monks from this time onwards were considered to be no longer in “conflict with the territorial, *wat*-centred basis of *sangha* administration” (O’Connor 1978, p. 151). This occurred by the late 1920s and early 1930s, when Man, as mentioned in the previous chapter, had been given an honorary Phra Khruu rank. Thus, contrasting somewhat with Tambiah’s findings (1984, p. 333; 1987*a*, p. 112), forest monks were included in the official nomenclature system, an effective ideological means of bringing regionally popular wandering forest monks into the heart of the central ecclesia, the fabric of the state and political establishment. In a sense it also facilitated the undermining of Isaan particularism or separatism. With this frame in mind, a discussion of monastic ranks with particular relevance to forest monks follows.

### RANKS, TITLES, AND INSTITUTIONALIZATION

Some prominent forest monks (especially during the troubled 1950s and 1960s) were conferred Jao Khun category ranks, either directly by the king (in the case of Ajaans Wan and Chaa) or through the formal clerical line (such as Sing, Thet, and Lii). Other forest monks were given the lower category



of Phra Khruu (as had Man's teacher, Ajaan Sao — though he never used it), including monks such as Ajaans Rian, Ornsii, Bunjan, among others. Ajaan Mahaa Bua is one of the few contemporary *kammathaan* monks to have shown his disapproval for monastic title as he was also offered a Phra Khruu rank but refused to accept his official fan (*phat-yot*)<sup>9</sup> from the Supreme Patriarch. In so doing, he was asserting an "anti-structure" statement and overt rebuff to the politico-religious establishment.

There were also a great many forest monks who preferred avoidance and seclusion throughout their lives, receiving no official recognition through the ecclesiastical nomenclature system. Many of these forest monks were well-known in the northeast, and some the bureaucratic institutions never really caught up with. These include Man's pupils: Ajaans Oun, Kirng, Chorp, Bua, Ornsaa, Kuu, Kwaa, Khao, Waen, and Teur. Two of these famous forest teachers acclaimed nationally as saints, Ajaans Khao Anaalayo and Waen Sujinno, declined to even administer the monasteries in which they spent the last part of their lives. Both left these tasks to resident senior monks, in Waen's case, Ajaan Nuu Sujitto and Khao, Ajaan Bunpheng Khemaaphirato (both still alive at the time of writing and now figureheads at both monasteries).

Many monastic informants mentioned that forest monks are normally compelled to accept clerical ranks. Those with formal rank and position find their life-style changes, although not all ranks carry official functions and are purely honorary titles. There has been some considerable conflict among forest monks over accepting ecclesiastical ranks. There are two camps, those following Mahaa Bua who would prefer to decline if given a chance, and those who simply go along with the wishes of the system. Although a distinction is made between *pariyat-tham* and *patibat-tham* monks in respect to nomenclature, both in fact come under the same governance.

From my research there appeared to be no direct correlation between the actual process of monastic domestication and those head monks with ecclesiastical rank, as many had this conferred as an honorary distinction. As it happened there were other factors, which I shall discuss in a later chapter, responsible for the change towards routinization and monastic institutionalization.

There are two methods of bestowing Phra Khruu rank; firstly, Phra Khruu Sanyaabat, originally given directly by the king but nowadays through the ecclesia (Sangha Council and Department of Religious Affairs) with the king's final seal of approval. This is an administrative rank composed of four



classifications, with promotion after five years.<sup>10</sup> Secondly, Phra Khruu Thaanaanukrom, which was originally also conferred directly by the king. But, in this case the authority passed directly to senior monks of Phra Raachaakhana Chan (level) Raat and upwards (Wichian and Sunthorn 1985, p. 133).<sup>11</sup> It is less formal but still carries a monastic fan and title. This rank nevertheless is important from the point of view of forest monks as it entails a dyadic relationship between monastic senior (*pariyat-tham*) and pupil (frequently the former's secretary). This system of conferment does not pass through formal clerical and civil lines, as in the case of Phra Khruu Sanyaabat.

In Ajaan Man's case, as we saw, he was given the rank and designation Phra Khruu "Winaithorn" (Thaanaanukrom category) probably at the instigation of Phra Ubaalii or Phra Panyaaphisaanthen "Nuu", around the time of Man's residence in the north. These were northeastern high-ranking monks who held Man in great esteem and perhaps hoped that, by conferring a rank, he would become involved more intimately with the missionary and institutional focus of the Thammayut.

However, as we saw earlier, Man was not interested in being drawn into the ambit of religio-politics, and for much of his life remained on the exteriority of conventional institutions. Some of the master's senior disciples and associates who had been successful *pariyat* monks mediated on Man's behalf with ecclesiastical and civil (*faai baan meuang*) authorities in the provinces and in Bangkok. Perhaps largely because of Man's "distance" from Thai institutions, many senior establishment figures were suspicious and perplexed about his mystical reputation and acclaimed saintly virtues. Here, for the first time in living memory, there was reputed to be a forest-dwelling monk combining the attributes of primordial *arahan* (doctrinal tradition) with the indigenous wandering tradition (hitherto considered by urban reformers to be concerned with divination, theurgy, and various nature practices associated with folk Brahmanism and animism).

### TRADITIONAL ACTIVISM AND REGIONAL DISCORD

Perhaps considering the domestic climate in the first decade of the twentieth century, including the impact of the reforms and sporadic peasant unrest in parts of the northeast, Bangkok may have had good reason to take an interest in Man's emerging career in sensitive outlying provinces. Yet, as Keyes said, there was little connection with rural disturbances and forest monks.<sup>12</sup> The abhorrence of both normative practising monks and the Thammayut to



“superstitious” religious accretions led senior northeastern Thammayut monks to denounce the 1901–2 millennial uprising. Keyes also felt that Tisso may have had some suspicion of Man as “another type of *Phu mi bun*” (charismatic individuals reputed to have substantial merit powers and usually the natural leaders of millennial movements). During this time Wachirayaan (1971c, p. 116) had written to the king expressing concern that the only easily accessible texts in the northeast were concerned with “Phuumiibun” and that this led to perverted practices and distorted views among the local *sangha*. The spill-over in the secular-political domain from popular millennial movements had enormous repercussions for the Siamese administration up-country.

But despite Tisso’s (along with other senior administrative monks) negativity to Man and his pupils, the connection with *Phuumiibun* seems unfounded. Man’s impeccable ordination lineage to Mongkut’s personally chosen missionary Ariyakawii “Orn” should be borne in mind, along with his firm relationship with a select number of administrative élite in the provinces and in Bangkok. In fact paradoxically, although a product of the far Lao-speaking provinces, Man’s support did not so much come from traditional élite, due largely to personal and formal links with the reform movement (in contrast with the charismatic northern Thai monk leader Khruubaa Siiwichai).

At the same time Ubaalii (then Phra Yaanarakkhith), whose advice was sought by central government as to the cause of the millennial uprising (Keyes 1977a, pp. 299–300),<sup>13</sup> would have dispelled any doubts about Man’s interest in the *Phuumiibun*. Therefore, in a sense a product of the northeastern countryside, Man was “other-worldly” and concerned with teaching a universal *dhamma*. The intimidation he posed to the establishment was more religio-administrative than purely “political”. His personal charisma attracted a dedicated band of followers at a time when Bangkok was desperately trying to control and reform the national *sangha*. Man was the converse of worldly activism, the feature of both northeastern radical village monks and Khruubaa Siiwichai’s lineage in the north.

Keyes (1982, p. 168) remarks that Man was considered an “outsider” to the establishment, pursuing the *dhutanga* practices which were considered “unpopular”. This was certainly correct in the first phase (1892–1916) of his career, as Thet (1978, p. 41) says, when “wandering” was regarded as “shameful practice” and not to the liking of Bangkok reformers. With Man’s apparent success at detaching himself from the concerns of society and the



establishment *sangha*, he was considered to be “charged with power” (Keyes 1982, p. 168). Thus, while not a dissenting activist, Man was nevertheless a potential danger to the establishment until his “power” was eventually translated into normative terms, symbolic of the classic Buddhist saints.

#### EXPANSIONISM, REGULATION OF THE *SANGHA*, AND FOREST MONKS’ CHARTER

A great deal of dissonance at the centre was connected with enduring hostilities in the *sangha* between “book learning” and meditation as mentioned in Chapter One, capped with the overall emphasis placed on education. As discussed in Chapter Three, the statist policy of expanding education (especially Thai language) and a structured curriculum to outlying provinces had the effect of engendering a “Thai” consciousness and reaffirming politico-cultural ties to the Siamese metropole (see Anderson’s [1983, pp. 114–20] related discussion). The stress on education (Thai and Pali studies) was felt at all levels in the *sangha* hierarchy, evidenced by an official announcement from Chinawornsiriwat, the Supreme Patriarch (Phra Sangkharaat), in 1928. This announcement directed all monks to take an active part in assisting civil officials to teach *dhamma* in schools. A follow-up announcement was issued the same year by the Jao Khana Monthon Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa and the acting head of Monthon Udorn to the northeastern *sangha* under his jurisdiction. It would appear that only in the Northeastern Region were specific detailed guidelines set down for carrying out this directive.<sup>14</sup>

Administrative reforms around the turn of the century led to a growing sense of mistrust and reservation about individualistic monks like Man. Suffice to say, Damrong’s design of bureaucratic reforms was formulated with a negativity towards a separate Lao ethnicity in his attempt to make all dependencies and half-dependencies inner provinces (Siffin 1966, p. 67; Keyes 1967*a*, p. 17). As one scholar<sup>15</sup> recently remarked, in Damrong’s thinking “one was either Thai or anti-Thai”. Damrong, as we have seen, was intolerant towards any sense of regionalism or “local particularism” in the northeast. Official attitudes were not altogether positive towards the people of the outer provinces, as, for example, with Prince Sanphasitthiprasong, the king’s special representative in Monthon Isaan (1893–1910), who in communication with the king referred to northeasterners as stupid and ignorant (Keyes 1977*a*, p. 300).



One contemporary northeastern Thai scholar (Paithuun in Keyes [1977a]) suggests some underlying motives for this patronizing attitude embedded in the Siamese view that northeasterners had not yet come to "appreciate" rational conformative systems and new ways of ordering behaviour. As a consequence, perceiving a cultural disjunction and threat to national identity, Keyes says that Chulalongkorn, Damrong, and other close advisers to the king pushed enthusiastically for a programme of national integration.<sup>16</sup>

Wachirayaan, as head of the Thammayut and later the Greater Thai Sangha, saw the need to centralize *sangha* affairs (resulting in the Sangha Act of 1902, *Phra Raatchabanyat Kaankhanasong*), but showing some sensitivity (as mentioned above) worked with Damrong's overall formulation. However, it seemed that some outlying *monthon* in the north and northeast proved quite intractable until many years after the 1902 Sangha Act (Wyatt 1969, pp. 328–29). Perhaps a step-by-step implementation process may have been the wisest course for a centralized state cognizant of the dangers of too rapid change and its likely repercussions (as in millennial outbursts).

Sixth Reign documents (National Archives, *Seuksaathikaan*, 10/44) mentions that some twenty-two years after the Act was passed, *monthon* Phaayap, Pattaanii, and Mahaaraat sought approbation from the Sangkharaat to implement the Act, which was only selectively and gradually enforced. The Act was intended as an expedient means of administering a new structured *sangha* and, as stipulated in Article 3, was not intended to "interfere" with *nikaai* concerns or matters of doctrine. These would, as before, come under the responsibility of the respective *nikaai* heads. In effect the Act muted individuality or personal charisma and instead codified and endorsed "ex officio" institutional charisma (Ishii 1986, p. 78).

The reform system of using institutional heads of royal monasteries and successful *pariyat* monks in *sangha* administration was to the disadvantage of forest monks in "monastic government" (Ferguson and Ramitanondh 1976, p. 110). As previously discussed, the newly trained monastic scholars were to spearhead the centralized reforms and they considered forest-dwelling monks as useless vagrants living in the uncivilized purlieus of society. However, true ascetic monks chose to remain outside administrative structures and in turn were just as contemptuous of their studious brethren, especially to the latter's fervent exegetical concerns and personal ambitions. Bureaucratization of the *sangha* sanctioned the peripheralization and marginalization of forest monks to the point whereby they lost their formal



recognition and institutional relevance. In some cases this meant that senior forest monks were unable to perform higher ordination, which created some discord among disenthralled monks with “strong regional followings” (Płaczek 1981, p. 157). Yet in another sense, although formally positioned on the confines of the institutional *sangha* (and thus not contending for ecclesiastical offices and prestigious positions), forest monks are very much part of the religious establishment (O’Connor 1985, p. 25 n. 10). Reflecting historical circumstances, there are presently no grounds for conflict between scholar monks and forest monks over administrative clerical positions in the *sangha* hierarchy.

As we have seen, Wachirayaan tried to standardize *sangha* behaviour through the centralized Thammayut, a prototype for the rest of the nation. Yet there was strong resistance and recalcitrance in some areas, as noted in Tisso’s correspondence to Wachirayaan. Regional religious expressions and charismatic monks with informal followings were to be normalized under central *sangha* injunctions, supervised by missionary Thammayut monks;<sup>17</sup> though Khaneungnit (1985, pp. 40–41) shows that Wachirayaan was all too aware of the problems in sending Thammayut monks to teach in Mahaanikaai territory and expected eventually to place suitably qualified Mahaanikaai monks in local administrative and teaching positions.

Wachirayaan, continually under the watchful eye of Chulalongkorn, attempted to bridge the distance between the two Thai *nikaai*. His famous text *Winaimuk* (Pali: *Vinayamukha*, “Entrance to the *Vinaya*”) was one attempt in this direction.<sup>18</sup> In trying to strike a balance, Wachirayaan was just as critical of monks who were excessively punctilious as of those who were too lax. For this reason he may not have sympathized too much with the hardened and meticulous forest monks; the latter no doubt seeing him as too innovative and compromising over a primitive disciplinary code. Apparently, Wachirayaan, like Mongkut before him, was not sympathetic to the forest way of life and even felt that there were no longer any monks who could attain the “noble levels” or *arahantship*. This attitude would not have gone down well among practising forest monks intent on its universal soteriology and the higher attainments through austerities and consistent meditation. Whilst Wachirayaan’s *sangha* reforms were far-reaching in many respects, rooted in the primitive monks’ charter (as universal tradition), at the same time they were by necessity historically particularistic.

Forest monks around this time referred to a more detailed precisian interpretation of the *winai* text called the *Buphasikkhaawannanaa* (Pali:



*Pubbasikkha Vinnana*). Wachirayaan's own more selective and transposed composition, the *Winaimuk*, which came out in 1913, replaced this earlier *winai* treatise originating in Mongkut's radical early period of Pali scholarship (these were the original "purists" at the forefront of the reforms mentioned in Chapter Three). The *Buphasikkhaa* provided the foundation for Wachirayaan's own later work, considered too compromising, compacted, and even "modernist" by many forest monks (the text in places is also critical of the early reform orthodox tradition). In fact Wachirayaan's three-volume *Winaimuk* was largely intended to complement the newly implemented clerical *nak tham* examinations. The first volume with *nak tham trii*, the second with *nak tham tho*, and the third — the highest — with *nak tham ek*. Thus, the *Winaimuk* effectively replaced the earlier complex *winai* treatise with a more systematized and examinable text. As well, it was a means of regulating the newly politicized national *sangha* and a compromise between radical tendencies in both *nikaai*.

Although written in convoluted and imperspicuous prose with many redundant words and phrases, the *Buphasikkhaa* is still a meaningful text followed by older forest monks. The *Buphasikkhaa*, following the Pali *Cullavagga* (in the *vinaya-pitaka*), contains details on the duties (Pali: *vatta*) of a monk towards his teacher, caring for one's abode, living in the forest, and so on. The repetitive circular discourse of "if this, then that; but if that, then this" makes tedious reading even to the most fastidious Thai reader.

The author of the *Buphasikkhaa* was a Grade Nine Pali scholar and a Phra Raachaakhana ranking monk from Wat Boromniwaat named Phra Amaraaphirakkhit "Koet" (1982). This monk is listed in a 1901 Fifth Reign document (National Archives, *Seuksaathikaan*, 8/19, 1–19, p. 12) as one of the early founders of the Thammayut. Amaraaphirakkhit was one of a group of monks sent to Sri Lanka during the Third Reign to obtain much-needed copies of the *Vinaya* and commentaries, later summarized in the *Buphasikkhaa*. Mongkut himself wanted to go to Sri Lanka but was refused permission by the king (Phra Nangklao) because of concern about his safety.

Whilst not immediate, the *winai* treatise was to prove useful for the reform forest monks providing a doctrinal framework for performative rituals. Forest monks told me that these meditation masters carried the *Buphasikkhaa* around with them. Ajaan Sao apparently had an early addition which also contained specific details on the traditional *dhutanga*, abbreviated in later additions. Up until the time of Man, the *winai* as applied orthopraxy was virtually non-existent among forest-dwelling monks in the northeast. In



general, the *Buphasikkhaa* was an important text in that it provided not only a normative reference for forest monks in the northeast but facilitated a vital link between these monks on the “outside” and the early scholastic Thammayut reformers.

Besides the functional relationship between scholars and forest monks within monastic lines, there were other concerns for administrators in Chulalongkorn’s new bureaucracy. In particular, the domination of the Mahaanikaai northeastern ecclesia by the centre created regional tensions, although this was largely absorbed under the new *sangha* structure. Mongkut’s early reforms had also introduced ethnic tensions of a different sort, namely, Mon and Siamese, which the Thammayut only managed to disentangle itself in more recent times (O’Connor 1980, p. 24). Apparently, Mongkut had reflected early on that the introduction of a Mon tradition with its distinctive ethnic associations may lead to ill feelings with conservative Thai establishment (Praphat 1964, pp. 233 ff.). Yet this did not dampen Mongkut’s enthusiasm for the Raaman (Mon) ritual practices through the few élite Mon monks he met, nor his efforts to convince monks in the establishment *Thai Nikaai* (*Khanasong Thai*) to reordain (Thanyawaat 1964, p. 40).

Where do the northeastern forest monks come into the religio-political configuration of the post-reforms? I have already shown that through Thammayut lines many were effectively frontiersmen for the nation-state in the outer provinces, caught in the nexus of prevalent social and political conditions. In general, monks and novices in the northeast have played a significant role in Thai *sangha* affairs (Tambiah [1978, p. 275], though with a later comment [1984, pp. 188–89] that northeasterners were blatantly prejudiced against in the Thai *sangha* hierarchy) with a long history of involvement in the Mahaanikaai, locally and in the capital. In fact, as we saw earlier, some northeastern monks secured positions of ecclesiastical power in the Thammayut where their personal ability and loyalty were found to be unreprouvable. Also, regardless of poor communications, there were a number of important early Thammayut monasteries in the northeast compared with the rest of the country.<sup>19</sup> Yet there is clear evidence that northeastern monks may not have been liked in the capital, and some informants said that they were discouraged from speaking Lao in the metropolis and unable to reside in some royal monasteries.

Another consideration is that northeastern Thammayut monks were prominent as founding figures in the north<sup>20</sup> and included, around the time



of Man, some Phra Raachaakhana monks resident in the capital. Many of these monks, as Keyes notes, "made up a significant number of the 'cadres' of the Wachirayaan revolutionary movement", and on at least one occasion were sent to suppress local "superstitious" practice among the Shans at distant Mae Horng Sorng.<sup>21</sup>

## CONFRONTATION IN UBON PROVINCE

One of the most controversial conflicts concerning forest monks and the local ecclesia headed by Tisso took place in Ubon in 1926. In fact Tisso's negativity in the 1920s may have left an indelible impression on formative events in the establishment of forest *samnak* in that province. Very few early Thammayut forest monks (most Ubon-born) chose to stay in and around Ubon, most settling in northern provinces of the present Northeastern Region (particularly Norngkhaai, Udorn, Sakon Nakhorn, Loei, and Nakhorn Phanom). It is perhaps no mere coincidence that Man's most important Mahaanikaai pupil, Ajaan Chaa Suphattho, became strong in Ubon and its neighbouring provinces. But there were other reasons for the preference of forest monks (largely Thammayut) to settle in the northern provinces, which I shall discuss in Chapter Eight.

In 1926 some fifty of Man's disciples headed by Ajaan Sing were encamped in a forest at Baan Hua Taphaan in Ubon (now incised into Yasothon province). The large group also included about one hundred female *mae chii* and lay followers. Tisso, at that time the Jao Khana Monthon Isaan, then ordered both the religious and civil District Officers from Amnaat Jaroen and *meuang* Saamsip districts to drive them away from the forest. He also arranged for a public notice to be put up warning villagers not to offer food to these monks. However, this was to no avail and the monks refused to move on. A District Officer came to see Sing, saying that he came on behalf of a provincial directive (from Tisso's office) and again told them to leave. Sing adamantly refused, saying that he was born in Ubon and did not see why he, or his band, had to go as they were causing no problem to anyone. Ajaans Fan Aajaro, Orn Yaanasiri, and Mahaa Pin Panyaaphalo helped to mediate and sought Man's advice. The master was staying by himself at the time in nearby Baan Norng Khorn forest and suggested simply that they consider the consequences carefully before acting. Orn and Mahaa Pin then went to see the Provincial Religious Head of Ubon (Jao Khana Jangwat) who disclaimed any involvement in this dispute. He then gave them



a letter to take to the District Officer to try to compromise, and the directive was eventually dropped.

Three years after this event Tisso was promoted to Phra Phrommunii, and in 1931 whilst at Khoraat radically changed his views and invited Sing, whom he had clashed with on a number of occasions in the past, to come to Khoraat, together with his band of wandering monks and teach *dhamma* to the villagers (Yaanasiri et al. 1977, p. 79). Tisso has not been recorded as having met Man (who at this time was in retreat in the Laannaa mountains), but would have heard about his reputation from colleagues and friends.

In defence of Tisso, one monastic informant, a senior *pariyat* monk in Ubon, said that he forbade the forest monks from wandering about his area of jurisdiction to prevent the escalation of simmering sectarian hostilities. The Thammayut-ordained forest monks were considered by the local Mahaanikaai *sangha* as missionaries and, whether this was their intent or not, they had this appearance and mien in their wanderings through traditional Mahaanikaai villages. As well, some informants mentioned that the sometimes arrogant, self-righteous attitude of forest monks may have annoyed Tisso (responsible for all monks, village, *pariyat*, and *patibat*) who consequently tried to control their increasingly dispersed autonomy. Around this time some reform forest monks would often criticize their *pariyat* brethren for not applying what they learnt from the texts, and thus knowledge which they had accrued was of little use to them in the liberating quest itself.

However, the authoritative biography of Ajaan Fan (Yaanasiri et al. 1977, p. 79) and oral accounts relate how Tisso considered forest monks unfavourably.<sup>22</sup> Man in particular was regarded as “unqualified” to teach *dhamma* to monks and the laity without formal study or having passed the requisite Pali (*perian*) and scripture (*nak tham*) examinations. On a personal level there may have been also some resentment at Man’s growing popularity. Essentially, Tisso’s dislike of wandering forest dwellers (within either *nikaai*) may be likened to Turner’s (1969) instructive notions of “structure” and “anti-structure”. Those institutional monks like Tisso, concerned with maintaining “structure”, see any sustained resistance as dangerous and possibly anarchical and “have to be hedged around with prescriptions, prohibitions and conditions” (ibid., p. 109). Also, as discussed in Chapter Eight, in Douglas’s (1966, *passim*, esp. chap. 6) terms, that which cannot be situated in established forms or classifications and is betwixt and between traditional boundaries is potentially “dangerous” and “polluting”.



Yet another account proposed that Tisso's disdain of the forest monks was exacerbated by his former ordinand Ajaan Sing after the latter had turned away from book learning to "practise". After Sing had received *dhamma* instruction from Man he returned to Tisso and tactlessly told him the uselessness of *pariyat* pursuits to which Tisso apparently responded by throwing his spittoon at Sing (this tale at least indicates the extent of vexation between the two dimensions of Buddhist monasticism). Nevertheless, after Tisso had started to practise meditation in an effort to overcome a debilitating illness, he changed his opinion of Man and some of his early pupils (see also earlier comment). As well, Ubaalii may have been an early influence on Tisso (Toem 1970, p. 629). Ajaan Fan Aajaro, known for his curative powers and knowledge of traditional medicine, also helped in bringing about Tisso's changing attitude after treating him for an ailment whilst in Ubon, as did Ajaan Lii Thammatharo — another of Man's pupils — through teaching him meditation in Bangkok. Tisso was very impressed by Lii's meditation teaching, praising him above his contemporaries. In 1953 Tisso had even encouraged him to teach meditation to both monks and the laity affiliated to Wat Boromniwaat in the capital and asked Lii to stay close by until his death (Lii n.d. [b], pp. 64 ff.).

Tisso, with the distinction of becoming the first Sangha Prime Minister (Sangkhaanaayok) in 1941 (Toem 1970, p. 659; Yaanasiri et al. 1977), had an impressive career. He started off as a Mahaanikaai novice but ordained as a Thammayut monk at Wat Siithong in Ubon when he was twenty years of age. Maaao, the famous early pioneering Thammayut monk (mentioned in Chapter Three) was his preceptor. Tisso began his *pariyat* studies in earnest four years after his ordination following his mentor and elder kin, Phra Ubaalii, to the capital (Toem 1970, pp. 651–54). He attained *perian* Grade Seven (the highest level is Grade Nine), residing first at Wat Boromniwaat and then as abbot at Wat Supat in Ubon. He was largely responsible for encouraging the growth of Pali and *dhamma* studies in Ubon started by his predecessor Ubaalii (*Anusorn-ngaansedet Phra Raatchadamnoen Songprakorp-phithiitadluuk nimit Phuukphatthasiimaa ubosot lae songthethornglor-phraprathan Wat Doi Mae Pang, Amphoe Phrao, Jangwat Chiangmai, 24–26 Kumphaphan 2522* [In commemoration of establishing sanctified area around the convocation hall (*bot*) and making a golden Buddha image at Wat Doi Mae Pang, 24–26 February 1979], 1979, p. 34). He died after protracted illness in Bangkok at the age of eighty-nine (National Archives, *Seuksaathikaan*, Fifth Reign, 8/19).



Another incident showing the resentment of forest monks in the 1920s and 1930s involved an administrative monk named Upatchaa Lui, the sub-district Religious Head (Jao Khana Tambon) for the Thammayut at Baan Kheng Yai now in Yasothon province. Phra Lui had heard that Fan and his younger kin Ajaan Kuu Thammathino (1900–53), both pupils of Man, were constructing *kuti* for the coming rains in a nearby forest and went to chase them away. Seemingly, Phra Lui could not find sufficient reason to force them to leave and had to return home (Yaanasiri et al. 1977, pp. 54–55). Phra Lui, as the most senior monk in the sub-district, was also mentioned as something of a problem in Ajaan Lii's autobiography and, as with Fan before him, tried to drive Lii away when he encamped in the area.

### RESONANCES FROM THE CENTRE; FRONTIERSMEN AND THE STATE

As Man's popularity started to grow at various impact points in the periphery, the effects were soon to be felt in the centre. Thus the Thammayut could not ignore the attention by a number of well-placed northeastern *pariyat* monks and some of the urban élite. The Thammayut may have thought their forest monks an appropriate vehicle to extend its influence into the far corners of the countryside, places where monk-educators were unable or unwilling to penetrate.

During the early phase of Man's peripatetic career he travelled extensively into Laos and northeastern provinces as well as into Burma and the hilltribe areas of the north (Mahaa Bua 1982, p. 35). Many of these were pockets of the country where the bureaucratic lines were having difficulty in reaching and thus Man and his pupils could in a sense have been viewed as ideal extension agents of reform.

In the north, we learn of monks such as the aforementioned Ajaans Thet, Fan, Lii, Khao, and a monk named Saan having interaction with isolated hilltribes and depending on them for daily alms. These included tribal groups such as the Akha, Khamu, Hmong, and Lahu (Musser). Thet (1978, p. 145) claims to have been the first Thai monk to have spent the *phansaa* with the Lahu. Man reputedly taught many tribal people during his journeying and in places gained their respect and trust.<sup>23</sup> In one account, the tribal people were perplexed by Man's meditative regimen and, whilst he was walking back and forth in meditation (*jongkrom*) was asked if he had lost something, to which Man said he was looking for his mantra (*mon*), "Phuttho" (repetitive



word used in meditation; “Phut” with the in-breaths, “tho” with the out-breaths).

Keyes (n.d.) mentions an area in the northwest where *thudong* monks had been living among the Karen for varying periods of time since World War II. Only a few of these monks stayed for any length of time teaching the villagers, most preferring to move on after a short stay. The relationship of these *thudong* monks to Karen was generally limited to seeking alms-food and suitable shelter but occasionally giving sermons to curious onlookers (note the contrast with Khruubaa Khao [Pii] a messianic monk in the Siwichai lineage with a large Karen following, see endnote 7). In fact the secluded mountains seem to have been ideal for the northeastern meditators and, as mentioned earlier, Man himself was reluctant to leave this idyllic setting. It will be remembered that this empathy for the north was also shared among a number of Man’s key disciples who, like the master, reputedly attained *arahantship* whilst resident in Chiang Mai — Ajaan Khao Anaalayo in 1935 or 1936 and Ajaan Waen Sujinno, according to one source, in 1969, both in Phrao district (Mahaa Bua 1986b, p. 342).

After Man’s initial wandering phase he started to firm up connection with the capital, making occasional trips to Bangkok, staying at the previously mentioned monastery for northeastern monks, Wat Sapathum or Pathumwanaaraam (situated today next door to the Siam Intercontinental Hotel) and central Thammayut bases. Wat Pathumwanaaraam was well-known at that time as a centre for teaching meditation. The abbot, Phra Panyaaphisaanthen “Sing” (mentioned in Chapter Three), was Wachirayaan’s friend and highly regarded as a teacher of meditation to both monks and the laity. Wachirayaan’s “Essentials of Meditation Practice”, mentioned earlier in this chapter, was written as a cremation volume for this monk in 1915. Man’s northeastern scholar-monk friend, Phra Panyaaphisaanthen “Nuu”, became the next abbot of this monastery.

According to one biographical source (Wiriyang 1980), Man first went to the capital to accompany his travelling companion of the same name, Phra Man, as they had been staying together in a Burmese forest. But more likely, as another account states, Man first visited Bangkok at Ubaalii’s invitation (probably in 1914) and whilst in the capital would take the opportunity of discussing practice and doctrine with his friend and senior at Wat Boromniwaat.<sup>24</sup> Although the transmission of normative doctrine to the forest monks can be directly attributed to the period of the Thammayut reforms, Man’s determination in his practice and interpretation of particular



doctrines emerged largely from his own personal experiences. Man apparently went to the capital to talk with Ubaalii and evaluate his experiences and understanding of the normative texts.

In general, during those days most long-term monastic inmates were exposed to substantial tracts of Pali. Young northeastern novices were simultaneously taught the Thai and Lao alphabets in addition to Pali passages (*aksorntham* or *tuatham*) for writing sermons. It may be remembered that (assuming the text was his own effort) even Man's one-time controversial *Muttothai* (Man 1988)<sup>25</sup> contains liberal use of Pali phrases with his own personal explication (Man had been a novice for a couple of years and more than likely had some exposure to elementary Pali texts). Ubaalii, as also with a number of Man's pupils who had received formal monastic education, was certainly well-versed in the exegetical language. Because there were many teaching materials available in Pali, literate people at the time of Man would generally have had a better knowledge of this exegetical language than today.

Ubaalii, as mentioned earlier, was largely responsible for initially supporting and defending Man in the metropolis. An informant<sup>26</sup> mentioned that Ubaalii may have committed himself to promoting the Thammayut, reassuring the central administrators of the potentialities among selected northeastern *monthon*. As we have seen, Ubaalii was particularly concerned about education, which was the main impulse and concern of Wachirayaan's reform programmes. Despite the presence of senior northeastern *pariyat* monks in the capital, the Thammayut were obviously apprehensive and somewhat circumspect towards the northeast, particularly its wandering forest-dwelling mendicants. These were monks who undertook particular austerities out of personal commitment and, as the administrators soon realized, were not always easy to regulate.

Ubaalii may have asked Man to help at times in missionary work, although Man was never a willing participant and preferred to leave this duty to some of his more committed disciples. One such monk was the younger brother of Ajaan Sing, named Mahaa Pin "Panyaaphalo", who was requested by Bangkok and provincial ecclesia to assist in establishing the Thammayut in various parts of the northeast. Some accounts mention that occasionally when Mahaa Pin arrived in some provinces it was to find that Phra Thammjedii "Mahaa Juum" (mentioned in the last two chapters) had already been before him (Thet 1978, p. 48), indicating that there was little coordination between monastic lines within the Thammayut. Both, as evidenced by their title "Mahaa" (minimum Grade Three Pali graduate), had



been *pariyat* monks early in their monastic careers and, besides informal obligations, like all *kanthathura* or study monks, they had to sign an undertaking (*khampathinyaa*) to perform all duties called upon by senior administrative monks for as long as they are in robes (Wachirayaan 1971*b*, p. 380).

Besides being noted missionaries, Sing and Mahaa Pin were two of Man's most senior *dhutanga* pupils, along with another lesser known reclusive monk mentioned in Chapter Four, Suwan Sujinno. These were Man's so-called "first group" of disciples, residing initially in Ubon but after a while wandering in the *dhutanga* fashion of their elusive master, founding *samnak* at the social purlieu and frontier in the northeast. Sing and Mahaa Pin had a not insignificant role in connecting the tenuous and seemingly immiscible links between the conventional *pariyat* and ascetic *patibat* dimensions. They were Man's "right-hand men" on his bureaucratic and formal teaching side and aided Man in teaching *dhamma* to monks and the laity (Mahaa Bua 1982, p. 32).

Sing also helped to make Man's lineage accepted by both the civil and monastic administration and, because of his determined and resourceful nature, became known as the "lion of the northeast" (*Sing Isaan*) (*Anusorn-ngaaensedet Phra Raatchadamnoen Songprakorp-phithiitadluuk nimit Phuukphatthasiimaa ubosot lae songthethornglor-phraprathaan Wat Doi Mae Pang, Amphoe Phrao, Jangwat Chiangmai, 24–26 Kumphaphan 2522* [In commemoration of establishing sanctified area around the convocation hall (*bot*) and making a golden Buddha image at Wat Doi Mae Pang, 24–26 February 1979], 1979, pp. 38–39). Mahaa Pin, a former Grade Five Pali scholar and *pariyat* teacher, like Ubaalii, had supposedly assisted in teaching some basic Pali to Man at one time. Mahaa Pin was reputed to be the first monk to establish the ecclesiastical *nak tham* intermediate course in the northeast (Thet 1978, p. 37) and was regarded as the first Grade Five Pali scholar to follow Man (*ibid.*, p. 41). Though in fact this latter decision was not taken lightly as both Sing and Duun had to firstly convince Mahaa Pin to leave his worldly interests behind, before taking to the forests (Duun 1983, pp. 24–25). Mahaa Pin died three years before Man, like many of his contemporaries (including Man), from tuberculosis.

Where possible, the Thammayut were clearly unabashed at using forest monks in Man's lineage from about the mid-1930s onwards taking advantage of their dispersed and growing informal networks. One example will suffice to show how some of the *dhutanga* monks became embroiled in emissary



activities for the Thammayut, clearly antithetical to their professed reclusive and ascetic ideals. In this following example it will be seen that the monk, Ajaan Daeng Thammarakhito, was to a large extent complying with “orders” (*sang*) passed down from his monastic seniors.

Daeng was born at Ubon in 1909, ordaining first as a Mahaanikaai monk in 1929 at Wat Siitaat in Kumphawaapii district, Udonthanaai province. His first contact with Man’s *kammathan* monks came when Ajaan Kongmaa wandered through on his way from Wat Paa Wiwektham in Khorn Kaen — an important centre for *dhutanga* monks at the time — to another branch *samnak* not far from Daeng’s monastery, established some time earlier by Ajaan Sing and Ajaan Duun. Kongmaa gave Daeng a copy of Sing’s book on meditation and devotional preparatory ritual mentioned earlier, *Traisarankhom lae samaathiwithii*, which inspired him to practise meditation. He then found that the ascetic regimen and life as a village monk were antipathetical vocations and that serious meditation needed a strict disciplinary regimen and supporting environment. At the end of the rains retreat, Daeng went to find Sing in Khorn Kaen, after which they went wandering in the wilds together. Then Daeng followed another of Man’s disciples, Ajaan Kuu Thammathinno, returning to Udorn and then Norngkhaai. Daeng then decided to seek permission from his old *upatchaa* to reordain, but first sat for the basic level *nak tham trii* ecclesiastical examination held during the rains’ retreat, then reordaining at Wat Sutthajindaa in Khoraat with Tisso as his *upatchaa*. Sing then sent him to stay with his brother Mahaa Pin at Wat Paa Sutthaaruam and after the rains went *thudong* to Pakthongchai district with Mahaa Pin and Lii Thammatharo. At this place he met up with two other pupils of Man, Ajaans Fan Aajaro and Orn Yaanasiri. They returned together to Khoraat, then Sing sent him to another forest *samnak* after which he went wandering by himself to Lopburii, Saraburii, and Bangkok. On his return journey he met with Ubaalii’s younger brother, a *pariyat* abbot of a monastery in Lopburii.

In 1935 Daeng was “invited” to sit for the *nak tham tho*, second stage examination. Around this time Lii was setting up his monastery in a Janthaburii cremation ground and Sing asked him to go and help. Daeng stayed for two *phansaa* (1937–38) and then returned to Kaalasin in the northeast to visit his relatives. It was during this time that Daeng was invited by villagers to set up a forest *samnak* in Thaakhantho district, later to be called Wat Paa Saamakhiitham and stayed for four years. In 1939 Phra Thammajedii “Mahaa Juum” went to Chiang Mai, as we have seen, to invite



Man to return to the northeast. Man initially stayed at Wat Paa Nonniwet in Udorn for one *phansaa*, then in the forest on the outskirts of the *meuang* (but today a domesticated monastery inside the town itself). Daeng went to see Man during this time and subsequently followed him about the Sakon Nakhorn countryside. In 1941 Daeng went off to establish another monastery in Kaalasin, Wat Paa Sakkawan in Sahatsakhan district, staying for four rains' retreats.

By this time Daeng's reputation as a resourceful pioneering monk in Kaalasin province was firmly established and he was invited to be the Jao Khana Amphoe covering three districts and sixteen monasteries. Daeng then went on to establish what was to become the provincial centre for the Thammayut in the township of Kaalasin, named Wat Prachaaniyom. In his official capacity, after each rains period he would undertake an inspection tour of his districts and overall seems to have been a harbinger of reform in Kaalasin, merging his interests together with what appeared to be least personal conflict. In later years Daeng became abbot of Lii's monastery after the latter died as prophesized at the age of fifty-five. At that time Daeng had been in charge of the Thammayut centre in Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa, Wat Paa Saalawan (Sing's former monastery). In 1964 Daeng was appointed as a leader of the newly established Phra Thammathuut missionary programme initiated by the Department of Religious Affairs and Sangha Council (for a discussion on this programme, see Tambiah [1976, chap. 18]). Daeng's group went to Siisaket for three months to teach doctrinal Buddhism then went on to Kaalasin for another three months. From 1969 to 1973 he resided at Wat Prachaaniyom, which as noted above he had established some years earlier. Corresponding to the height of Thammayut activities, from 1961 to 1976 Kaalasin was identified early by central planners as a "regional growth centre". Although, as Sternstein (1979, p. 8) said, "there was nothing at Kaalasin", when coupled with the main growth centre at nearby Khorn Kaen, it was one of the important governmental decentralized "growth poles".<sup>27</sup>

In the following years Daeng travelled extensively from Kamphaeng Phet to Janthaburii, organizing the construction of many new buildings at various *samnak*. At Lii's old monastery, Wat Asokaaraam in Samut Prakaan, he was asked to be president of the *dhamma* (*nak tham*) examinations held at the monastery since, after Lii's death, it became a formal *pariyat* institution. He returned to Wat Paa Saamakhiitham in Kaalasin and again became involved in the construction of new buildings and *pariyat* schools. Daeng, by this time



had little personal interest in the reclusive meditative life and died in 1987 at the age of seventy-eight after an impressive administrative career for the Thammayut (*Phra Suthamkhanaajaan Ramleuk*, 1988).

\* \* \* \* \*

To conclude this chapter, I have focused diachronically on highlighting developments transpiring from the later reform period, especially implications for the indigenous northeastern *sangha* and various polarity tensions between village and town, forest monk and scholar monk, the periphery (indigenous tradition) and the centre (Siamese state), the latter attempting to impose a unified sense of “national *sangha*”. In the frontier provinces we note both resistance and integration through the impact and supersession of hegemonic state power. Forest monks, standing at the purview of the Siamese institutions (seemingly little concerned with administrative boundaries, secular structures, and formal organized space) were at the same time crucial to the nation-state in its domestication of the frontier. In the north, with varying success, some of the wandering northeastern Thammayut monks were used to regulate and impose unifying standards (discipline and ritual) — in tune with national *sangha* aspirations — on the dissonant and fiercely individualistic Laannaa-thai fraternities, especially the lineage of Khruubaa Siwichai.

As mentioned earlier, forest dwelling in Southeast Asia has a long history and Man, although embedded in indigenous regional context, as an acclaimed *arahan* also faithfully replicated the primitive wandering charter, eschewing control by the state, but without direct confrontation. In his life Man was photographed only four times, the first at Sao’s cremation, the second at Wat Paa Saalawan in Khorat, the third at Baan Fang Dang in Nakhorn Phanom, and finally at Wat Paa Sutthaawaat in the town of Sakon Nakhorn not long before he died. He was something of an enigma to the authorities, who eventually decided that formal recognition would be the most expedient means of harnessing his regional popularity for its own purposes. As I have shown, many of his pupils were invaluable to the expansionary polity through Thammayut lines cast into the countryside.

Man was emblematic of the universal textual themes on one hand, yet profoundly influenced by Fifth Reign reforms in his interpretation and praxis of *Tham-winaï* as historical particularities (Tambiah 1984, p. 306). One way



this is indexically expressed is from an account by a former pupil of Man,<sup>28</sup> who said that the master regarded a number of prominent Thammayut reformist monks as *arahan*. Although not confirmed elsewhere and perhaps reflecting the interlocutor's views, the prince-monk Wachirayaan was supposedly the first Rattanakosin *arahan*, followed by Phra Ubaalii, then Phanthulo "Dii" (Wat Taai, Ubon) and Siithaa (Sao and Man's first teacher in Ubon mentioned in Chapter Four).

The central Siamese reforms in the early twentieth century effectively worked to undermine any sense of regional particularism or localized loyalties (indeed the reformers could see no alternative but displacement and reintegration). The indigenous social order with its maze of informal relationships and traditional institutions were shaken by the contagion of the reforms; not least the dispersed utilitarian local *sangha*. Wachirayaan tried desperately to unify the *sangha* and his *Winaimuk* was an attempt in this direction<sup>29</sup> although resistance on both sides proved immense.

The prevalent pattern in the northeast which bound the periphery and capital directly together were the educational channels within the Thammayut order. Here, promising northeastern monastic scholars were brought to the capital by kin, or non-kin patrons, for advanced Pali studies to be sent back after a few years with official rank and teaching position. Some of Man's own pupils had been through the educational system but had decided to leave behind formal monastic careers (*pariyat-tham*) for the personal liberating quest with its frugal and austere life-style. Simultaneously, there were many of Man's pupils who were illiterate or semi-literate, receiving little or no formal education and taking to the austere forest life after being impressed by the wanderers passing through the village. In general, it may be remembered that the condition of the provincial *sangha* was debased, faction-ridden, and disorganized and a reason given for many local monks to seek reordination in the lofty and relatively undifferentiated Thammayut-tikaa.

In this, and the previous two chapters, I have shown the importance of affinal or consanguineal kinship ties between northeastern Thammayut monks, some high-ranking members related to Man's pupils.<sup>30</sup> There was also the close network of formal ordination lines between Man, his pupils, and the monastic elite. Man, unlike many of his contemporaries, was able to detach himself to a large extent from bureaucratic *sangha* obligations by moving on the rim of social order — except at Chiang Mai when he



temporarily succumbed to pressure from in-house *sangha* administration. Forest monks, as with all monks, had to follow directions from civil and clerical administrators who may not have been entirely sympathetic to their ascetic wandering regimen, as we have seen in the case of Tisso and Upatchaa Lui. Mahaa Bua (1988, p. 3) comments that when he wanted to drop his *pariyat* interests (he had already attained Pali Grade Three in Chiang Mai) he was compelled to remain at the monastery by his then *pariyat* teacher. From deference and personal respect he felt he could not leave and had to wait some time for an opportune moment to disappear to the forests.

Whilst I see a perspicuous division between the vocations of “scholasticism” and “practice”, there were many Thammayut northeastern monks who preferred “shades” in between, monks who were later to become ecclesiastical heads of *tambon*, districts, or provinces. The forest monks themselves were supposedly concerned with personal salvation and in teaching normative religion, with little interest in the political dimensions of the Thammayut’s missionary programme. Yet there were elements in both *patibat* and *pariyat* who began to see the one as inseparable from the other.

At around the turn of the century, the Thammayut hierarchy in the latter part of Man’s life, primarily for religio-political motives — but also because of popular interest — gave its support to the meditation master and his lineage. Thet (1978, p. 187) remarks that around this time the attitude of the Thammayut “Elders” in the capital was positive and encouraging towards Man’s forest monks (those who had cultivated a rapport with urban élite). In Man’s now-famous funeral photograph taken at Wat Paa Sutthaawaat on 13 January 1950, it will be noticed that besides many of Man’s early pupils there are some high-ranking Bangkok and provincial monks. The most senior monk present was Somdet Mahaawiirawong “Phim Thammatharo”, also including Phra Phrommunii “Phin Suwajo”, who became the abbot of Wat Bowornniwet and inspiration for the present abbot and new Supreme Patriarch of the Thai Sangha Somdet Yaansangworn (see Chapter Eight), Phra Thammajedii “Mahaa Juum” (a northeastern *pariyat* monk who had long maintained firm relations with the master and *upatchaa* for many of his pupils), and a number of other Phra Raachaakhana high-ranking monks.

From the 1950s onwards the forest tradition gains a new sense of respectability and the lineage of Man becomes unequivocally institutionalized by the Thammayut and secular élite. This had far-reaching ramifications for forest-dwelling monks generally in the Greater Thai Sangha.



# NOTES

1. Sing founded Wat Paa Saalawan, Khorat, the centre for the Thammayut and an important site for the early wandering monks. Sing (Phra Yaanawisit Samitthiwiiraajaan), from Ubon, had a total of fifty-two *phansaa*. He was ordained at Wat Suthat in Ubon in 1909, and Tisso (then Phra Saasanadilok and Jao Khana Monthon Isaan) was his *upatchaa*. Sing was formerly a *pariyat* teacher at Thammayut monasteries in Ubon before taking to the forest. Despite the fact that he was regarded as the most senior disciple of Man, his links with institutional interests, especially establishing new monasteries, remained a predominant feature of his life. He was not regarded as an *arahan* (by popular consensus and, relatedly, by the fact that his cremated remains did not crystallize), although he was a fine teacher of meditation and an author of a number of standard texts on the subject.
2. For Sing, see Damrong Phurayaa (January 1984); and for Siiho's account of this incident, see *Phra Kammathaan* (n.d., vol. 2, pp. 216–17).
3. Ajaan Kongmaa, founder of Wat Doi Thammajedii in Sakon Nakhorn, was reputed to be an exemplary monk and meditation teacher. Kongmaa was born in Sakon Nakhorn, his father a trader. Kongmaa married a local girl who died during pregnancy and, filled with sorrow, then decided to ordain (Mahaanikaai). In 1926 Kongmaa first met Man and became his disciple, following him around the countryside. Kongmaa, upset by the poor standard of practice and discipline among the local Mahaanikaai *sangha*, reordained as Thammayut two years after meeting Man at Wat Buuraphaa — his *upatchaa* was Phra Panyaaphisaanthen “Nuu”. Kongmaa died in a car accident near the monastery in 1962. See further mention of Kongmaa in Chapters Six and Eight.
4. Personal conversation with Phra Mahaa Suwit, Wat Phothisomphon, Udornthaanii, 1987.
5. In order to regulate monastic discipline at his many monasteries, Ajaan Chaa set an additional fifteen rules and arranged for regular meetings among his senior disciples. But in this, Ajaan Chaa is the exception. Also, a few of Ajaan Chaa's branch monasteries are overseas (at the time of writing, Amaraawadii and Chithurst in England, Wat Paa Phothiyaan in Western Australia, and a *samnak* in New Zealand), creating a new international dimension to the northeastern forest monk tradition.
6. In the biography of Ajaan Orn Yaanasiri (1976, p. 65) it is stated that in 1926 Man and his disciples whilst *en route* from Sakon Nakhorn to Ubon were



accused by the locals of destroying the forest where they were temporarily encamped. Apparently, this was an excuse to drive them away from the village precincts.

7. For central government control over the Laannaa *sangha*, see, for instance, Gosling (1983, pp. 92–93), Keyes (1971, pp. 554–59), and Tambiah (1976, pp. 239–41, 245–47).

Keyes (personal communication, 1988) mentions that Man's charisma "paled" in comparison with that of Siwichai. Man was shrewd enough to try and maintain firm relations with certain key lay and clerical people in power and some of his disciples were influential in the capital. Indeed, had he not, Man and his followers may have been branded as religious reactionaries, perhaps even arrested (despite their ordination purity) and brought to Bangkok for observation. Man in any case was not an inner-worldly activist and was disinterested in political matters outside of the *vinaya*, as opposed to Siwichai (Keyes 1982, 1989). On Laannaa activist monks in Khruubaa Siwichai lineage, see, for instance, Cohen (1983, 1984, 1987) and Tanabe (1986) on Phor Pan; Hinton (1979) on Khruubaa Khao.

8. Wachirayaan (1971*a*); Praphat Trinarong (1964, p. 468).
9. There are literally hundreds of ecclesiastical fans given for various functions and ranks. Those given to *wipatsanaa* monks are generally white in colour to distinguish them from the scholar-administrative monks. See Wichian and Sunthorn (1985).
10. At the 1984 census there were 5,073 monks in this category throughout the country; see Wichian and Sunthorn (1985, p. 114).
11. The ecclesiastical administrative ranks are basically as follows: Sangkharaat; Somdet Phra Raachaakhana; Rong Somdet Phra Raachaakhana; Phra Raachaakhana Chan Tham — Chan Thep, Chan Raat, and Chan Saaman (five levels); Jao Khun Sanyaabat and Phra Khruu Sanyaabat — Trii (third), Tho (second), and Ek (first).
12. Personal communication, 1988.
13. Ubaalii notes the effects of peasant unrest from Ubon to Sangkhla in Surin, saying that everyone was talking about *Phuu mii bun*. The "rice in the fields remained unharvested and cattle and buffaloes are allowed to eat it; garden plots and sugar cane [fields] have often been discarded" (quoted in Keyes [1977*a*, p. 297]). Giving his opinion for the underlying causes of the uprising, Ubaalii pragmatically argues that it was poverty (*ibid.*, p. 300).
14. *Thalaengkaan-khanasong* 16 (1928): 228–29; 349–52.
15. Tarr (1985); Tambiah (1976, p. 197).
16. B.J. Terwiel, Australian National University (personal communication, 1988),



in defence of Damrong said that the roping in of the outer provinces had in fact been a salient feature of various governments, before — and after.

17. See, for example, C. Reynolds (1972, p. 266), Tambiah (1976, p. 259), and Keyes (1971, p. 22).
18. I am grateful to Thanissaro Bhikkhu for first pointing this out to me. Than Geoff, as he is known, was one of the first Western monks to have passed all *nak tham* examinations, which consists in studying Wachirayaan’s many standard texts.
19. O’Connor (1985) remarks that the northeastern *sangha* in general now dominated the Greater Thai Sangha. Figures tend to support this. In 1968 the northeast (although with only one-quarter of the country’s population or by another reckoning 35 per cent) had 50 per cent of the country’s monasteries, 32 per cent of the monks, and 48 per cent of the novices (Tambiah 1973*b*, p. 84 n.; 1978, p. 275). Also, the largest proportion of long-term monks outside the central provinces and Bangkok are to be found in the northeast (Tambiah 1978, p. 276).

O’Connor (1978, p. 228) mentions that in the northeast, according to official 1969 figures the Thammayut were well represented statistically with an estimated 58 per cent monasteries (636 out of 1,094 monasteries throughout the region). Latest figures available at the time of writing show little real change, 65 per cent of total Thammayut monasteries in the northeast (905 from 1,400 monasteries). Yet in comparison with the intensity and spread of Mahaanikaai monasteries, the Thammayut represent only 6 per cent of the total monasteries in the northeast, and 8 per cent of registered *samnak song*. Recent figures are:

	1984	1985
Monasteries		
Thammayut	878	905
Mahaanikaai	15,047	15,123
<i>Samnak song</i>		
Thammayut	618	624
Mahaanikaai	7,046	7,581

SOURCE: *Kromkaansaasanaa*, Department of Religious Affairs (personal communication, 1986).

20. Namely, such monks as Jao Khun Ubaalii and Somdet Phra Mahaawiirawong “Phim Thammatharo”, who at the time had just been promoted from Phra Yaandilok to Phra Raatchakawii.



21. Personal communication, 1988.
22. An interview with Ajaan Wiriyaṅ (Wat Thammongkhon, Bangkok, May 1987), supposedly one of Man's last first-generation pupils, revealed a similar conclusion.
23. Mahaa Bua (1982, p. 130) mentions that the tribal people would have "readily sacrificed their lives" for Man, suggesting perhaps the ever-present possibility for the emergence of "this-worldly" charismatic leadership. According to one monastic informant, some tribal people still remember Man.
24. *Lokthip* 4 (year 1; August 1982): 38; Mahaa Bua (1982, p. 106).
25. *Muttothai* (Pali: *Muttodaya*) is reputedly a collection of some of Man's oral teachings textualized during 1944–45 whilst he was resident at Sakon Nakhorn a few years before his death. The term *Muttothai* is in reference to a comment made by Phra Ubaalii eulogizing one of Man's sermons. It implied that Man had "released his heart" during his teaching and conveyed to his listeners "the birth place of liberation" (*daenkoet haeng khwaamludphon*).

Whilst much has been written about Man's life, nothing of substance has been recorded of his sermons. Thus there has been a great deal of controversy over the years in regard to the legitimacy of *Muttothai* (for example, was it the work of the three monk-disciple compilers [Thongkham Praphaan, Ajaans Wan Uttamo, and Wiriyaṅ]? or, was it faithfully the teachings of the master?). As Man taught one-to-one, or in small groups, each talk tempered to the intuitive comprehension of his listeners, his teachings were thus highly personalized and needed to be contextually sited. As Thanissaro Bhikkhu in his translation of *Muttothai* titled "A Heart Released ..." (1988) mentions, Man's teachings were always face-to-face in the "form of people: the students whose lives were profoundly shaped by the experience of living and practising meditation under his guidance".

Because of Man's personalized teaching mode, each of his pupils may have felt it inappropriate to transcribe his sermons and that perhaps they should be best left as an oral tradition (in this thinking, Man's direct line of pupils will be the rightful inheritors of their master's teachings). Suffice to say there are historical antecedents in the meditation tradition for this anti-textual stance.

*Muttothai* is written in three parts taken from talks in the Lao idiom and later rewritten — and probably reworked — in Central Thai. The first part consists of early sermons; the second part later sermons written down by two disciples; and the third part consisting of short composite talks (*botpraphan*), exempla, and *dhamma* sermons (*botthammabanyaai*). This third category were supposedly written down in rough fashion by Man himself whilst staying at Wat Sapathum in Bangkok during a rains' retreat probably at the request of



its abbot, Phra Panyaaphisaanthen “Nuu”, Man’s northeastern friend and monastic senior.

The work reflects the level of understanding one would expect from someone better versed in the Pali Canon than simply a couple of years of novitiate elementary Pali; discourses are centred around “pithy” Pali utterances and quotations from the various *Sutta*. If it is not Man’s product, it may well be that the writer(s) subconsciously projected into the discourse something of their own cognitive and reflexive insights. At the very least it shows that Man’s understanding of the canon must have been better than hitherto assumed from a monk who spent nearly all his monastic life wandering in the forests and without any formal religious education. Providing an answer to this paradox, one former pupil of Man explained to me that Man’s canonical knowledge was a result of his meditation experiences and that in any case in a former life Man had reputedly been a disciple of the Buddha and thus had direct access to the founder’s oral teachings and ritual mnemonics.

26. Phra Mahaa Suwit Pujawijjo, a *perian* Grade Nine scholar from Wat Phothisomphon in Udonthanaai and a pupil of Somdet Yaansangworn (the new Supreme Patriarch at the time of writing) at Wat Bowornniwet.
27. Yet for accessibility as well as political purposes, Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa is the preferred focus for current regional development; see Handley (1989).
28. Interview with Thongkham Praphaan, 1989, the main compiler of Man’s *Muttothai*.
29. See especially the Preface and chaps. 2 and 3 in *Winaimuk*, vol. 1.
30. To give some examples of kinship links; the abbot of Wat Tham Phaabing, Ajaan Montri Khanasophano is the cousin of the recently deceased Luang Puu Lui Janthasaaro — Man’s early pupil; the present abbot of Wat Paa Kaew, Sawaang Daendin, Sakon Nakhorn, Ajaan Oun is parallel cousin of the late Ajaan Singthong; Tisso was Ubaalii’s junior kin; Ubaalii’s younger brother, Jao Khun Thepworakhun was abbot of Wat Maniicholakhon in Lopburii; Somdet Phra Mahaawiirawong “Phim Thammatharo” was Tisso’s nephew; Maa Thewathammi was related to Ubaalii; Sing and Mahaa Pin were brothers; and so on. Most of these monks came from Ubon. At Phannaanikhom district, Sakon Nakhorn among the Phuuthai community there were many forest monks (Kirsch notes the high preponderance of Phuuthai in his district attracted to the monastic life), but Ajaan Fan Aajaro especially stands out. Fan’s father was a pioneering Phuuthai headman (from Laos) in Sakon Nakhorn; his paternal cousins include two well-known disciples of Man mentioned in the text, Ajaans Kuu and Kwaa.



## CHAPTER SIX

# *Forest Monks, Metaphor and Popular Cult*

Making a small hut, plunging into the Añjana forest, I dwelt there. The three knowledges<sup>1</sup> have been obtained, the Buddha's teaching has been done. (Añjanavaniya, in Norman 1969, v. 55)

Most anthropological studies on Thai religion have by and large focused on either urban monasticism<sup>2</sup> or village "popular" Buddhism<sup>3</sup> as contraposed, with distinctive features and orientations (although in many ritual-related activities the distinctions are not always so perceptible). The well-endowed urban monasteries, especially in the nation's metropole (where most of the country's wealth is tied up), are seen as monastic institutions of learning (covering both secular and religious subjects [*pariyatti-thura*]), as well as a means of social mobility<sup>4</sup> and the focus of the literate, "great" tradition.

Urban monasticism, the locus of "rational economies" (Weber 1970, p. 332), created the very wealth, intemperance, and consumption the ascetic renouncers set out to reject. Yet in Thailand this urban wealth was not restricted to domesticated monasticism in the *meuang*, but spilt over into the social field of the forest monk domiciled in the nation's periphery. In turn as we shall see later, from the forest monastery much of the oblations filtered out to the depressed northeastern countryside and back into secular institutions such as community centres, hospitals, orphanages, schools, and so on.

This chapter, and the remaining three chapters, will be looking at contemporary events especially the changes in monastic practice brought about by the flow of wealth and elite patronage at the northeastern forest monasteries since the 1960s.

We have seen that the monastic forest dweller, largely because of his



regular habitat (co-existing with the anomalous wilderness, decay, and death), informal network of pupils and movement within the fringe of established order, has long been a cause of concern, ambivalence, and mistrust to the establishment. However, paradoxically the forest monk has simultaneously been revered not only in Thailand, but throughout the Theravada world (Khantipalo 1965, pp. 68–69). After all, more worldly monks were less likely to attain such mastery over external powers and self-control (personal attributes highly valued among the Thai) without physical and psychological detachment from society as a whole.

Within the natural ecology of the forest, away from sensory distraction, one is continually made aware of the mutability and vicissitudes of the way of the world (*thaanglok*). Forest teachers emphasize the uselessness of infatuated attachment to “conditioned *dhamma*”, turning inwards to training the mind-heart<sup>5</sup> (*jit-jai*, used interchangeably but normally combined) in the way of *dhamma* (*thaangtham*). External reality is simply the parts of the whole perceived through the sense bases and given creative meaning through the cognitive process (conscious mind, *withii-jit*). In the forest tradition the “mind-heart” is seen as the object for consistent awareness and mental cultivation, bounded by its conditioned form. The emphasis on the mind-heart as the cynosure of the practice can be appreciated in the following comment by the late Fan Aajaro (1899–1977): “the ‘wat’ is inside the heart, that is, the place of practice, we must go to the ‘wat’ everyday” (Mahaa Bua 1987*a*, p. 24). Note also the comment by Chaa Suphattho in the first chapter where the “mind” as sensory-emotional base is the focus of continual mindfulness (*khwaam mii sati*) and field of systematic training.

#### RELIC REPOSITORIES AND SANCTIFIED RELIGIOUS SITES

As mentioned earlier, forest monks are popularly conceived as “store houses” of merit and mystical powers (although to endorse such claims would lead to a serious disciplinary offence [*parajika apatti*]). Terwiel (1975) also notes that the *paatimok* (Pali: *patimokkha*) rules do not permit monks from discussing extraordinary experiences, though

it is less generally known that a rule from the fifth category of prescriptions, the *pacittiya* forbids monks even to tell the truth about his magical experiences.

But as Nanamoli (1966, p. 48) interprets this meaning, it pertains only to



an explanation of one's "superior human state" to a person not admitted as a fully ordained monk. Thus it may be found that among an inner-core of monk-disciples credible tales of supra-human endeavour were freely passed around and the material which constituted the controversial element in Man's biography (see Chapter One and especially Chapter Five, endnote 25). In the forest tradition silence on such matters — credible or otherwise — is generally considered tantamount to ratification.

Many forest teachers have been regarded (though rarely discussed as such directly) as national "spiritual treasures". The extent of such veneration can be appreciated by visiting the many grand relic-museums or repositories (*jediiphiphithaphan*) marking northeastern sites where Man's early pupils died in the "terminal" settlement phase.

Dry-season *jedii* tours are now a common feature and the focus of collective merit-making in a sense of "communitas" (Turner [1973, pp. 216–17], though social hierarchies flow over from outside and persist during the merit-making tour; I shall return to these tours in Chapter Nine). Noteworthy *jedii* include the master's at Wat Paa Sutthaawaat in Sakon Nakhorn and his pupils such as Juan Kulachettho<sup>6</sup> (1920–80), Fan Aajaro<sup>7</sup> (1899–1977), Wan Uttamo<sup>8</sup> (1922–80), and Khao Anaalayo<sup>9</sup> (1888–1983). This latter-mentioned monk was particularly popular among the élite and has an interesting life history which I now briefly sketch.

Khao was born in a poor farming family at Baan Borchaneng, Amnaat Jaroen district, Ubon province, in December 1888. He himself became a farmer and was married, with seven children. However, the young northeasterner was not content to scratch a living in the harsh Isaan countryside and decided to go to Bangkok in search of work. On his eventual return in 1919 he caught his wife *in flagrante delicto* with another man and threatened to kill them both. But instead, Khao managed to control himself and call the rest of the village to witness the affair. The distraught Khao then fled the house and ordained at the local monastery, Wat Phosii (he was then thirty-one years of age).

While he was residing at the local village monastery, Khao, according to his biographer, found the monks' discipline poor, but nevertheless stayed for six years. Then he decided to go wandering in the traditional fashion; though the villagers were reluctant to let him go as they considered wandering monks little more than homeless beggars who dabbled in the magical arts (Mahaa Bua 1984, pp. 4–7). Khao told the villagers that he would not come back if he did not attain liberation (*henjaeng*) or still had "doubts" (*songsai*) about



*dhamma* (ibid., p. 8). In the following years he wandered extensively to the mountainous areas of Phuusing, Phuuwuwa, Phuulankaa, Dong Morthong in Sekaa district, Norngkhaai province, as well as secluded places around Phon Phisai district and to Baan Phaeng district in Nakhorn Phanom — all these places were chosen for the seclusion and wild forest (Mahaa Bua 1986*b*, p. 227). During this period of wandering Khao reordained in the Thammayut.

Khao reputedly attained liberation (*upathisesa-nipphaan*) in 1935/36, sixteen or seventeen years after he first ordained, staying at that time in Phrao district, Chiang Mai (Mahaa Bua 1984, p. 41). He was supposedly the second pupil of Man to have attained *arahan'ship*). Then, after twenty years away from his home village he returned, as if to prove that he had found “liberation”, bringing with him two other disciples of Man, Ajaans Chorp Thaanaasamo (known for his lone adventures with tigers) and a relatively little-known monk named But (ibid.).

Khao first went to Wat Tham Klongphen in 1958, which at that time, like much of the Phuuphaan mountain range, consisted of pristine forest inhabited by tigers, elephants, and bears. By this time Khao was getting too old to move about so he decided to stay until his death at the age of ninety-five in May 1983. He was given a royal cremation the following year attended by the royalty and national political élite (see later discussion)<sup>10</sup>

During my initial visit to Wat Tham Klongphen in 1987 and again the following year, the magnificent *jedii* (already costing over 6 million baht, US\$230,770) was still incomplete after four years' work. The project had been plagued with contractual problems and disagreements by some sponsors such as over the colour of the imported Italian marble. It should be noted that Mahaa Bua (Wat Paa Baan Taat) highly regarded Khao's attainments, though long considered Wat Tham Klongphen in its “climacteric” phase unsuitable for practising monks due to the national attention Khao received later in his life. Suffice to say, in the Thai forest tradition (in contrast to the relatively stable contemporary Sinhalese “hermitage” movement) one has to disentangle permanent associations between forest monks and the monasteries in which they spent the last settled period of their lives.

Although the foregoing discussion has centred on Khao Anaalayo, there were many similar cases where a “*jedii* cult” (devotion to the saints' relics) emerged among Man's disciples. These monks include Ajaans Saam Akinjano (Wat Paa Traiwiwek, Surin), Bua Siripunno (Wat Paa Baan Norng Saeng, Udonthanaai), Bunmaa Thitapemo (Wat Paa Sirisaalawan, Udonthanaai),



Orn Yaanasiri (Wat Paa Nikhrothaaraam, Udonthanaani), Khamdii Paphaaso (Wat Tham Phaapuu, Loei), Wan Uttamo (Wat Tham Aphaidamrongtham, Sakon Nakhorn, see life story in Chapter Nine), and Phrom Jiripunyo (Wat Paa Prasitthitham, Udonthanaani), among others.

But perhaps the most splendid of all *jedii* in the northeast is Ajaan Fan Aajaro (Wat Paa Udom Somphorn, Sakon Nakhorn, see Photograph 5), replete with hand-carved stone murals with scenes of the teacher's wandering life, like *Jataka* tales. The *jedii* cost well over half-a-million U.S. dollars collected from donations coming largely from the capital. Because corruption was so rife, Mahaa Bua, as widely regarded lineage head, was asked to supervise the fund-raising as he had earlier with Man's *jedii* at Wat Paa Sutthaawaat in Sakon Nakhorn. In the latter instance, although Man had died in 1949, it was not until twenty-four years later that the first foundation stone was laid and, by that ceremony, marking the commencement of the modern "*jedii* cult" for forest monks throughout the northeast.

In Man's *jedii*, the original 975 donors (including business, military, and political élite)<sup>11</sup> were listed along with their contributions (averaging over 3,000 baht [US\$118] per person) in a widely distributed booklet. Many of the contributions were sent through Man's disciples, or prominent individuals, lay organizations, private and public corporations. The largest single donation came through Mahaa Bua's Wat Paa Baan Taat, largely because of Mahaa Bua's links with establishment élite in the provinces and the capital.

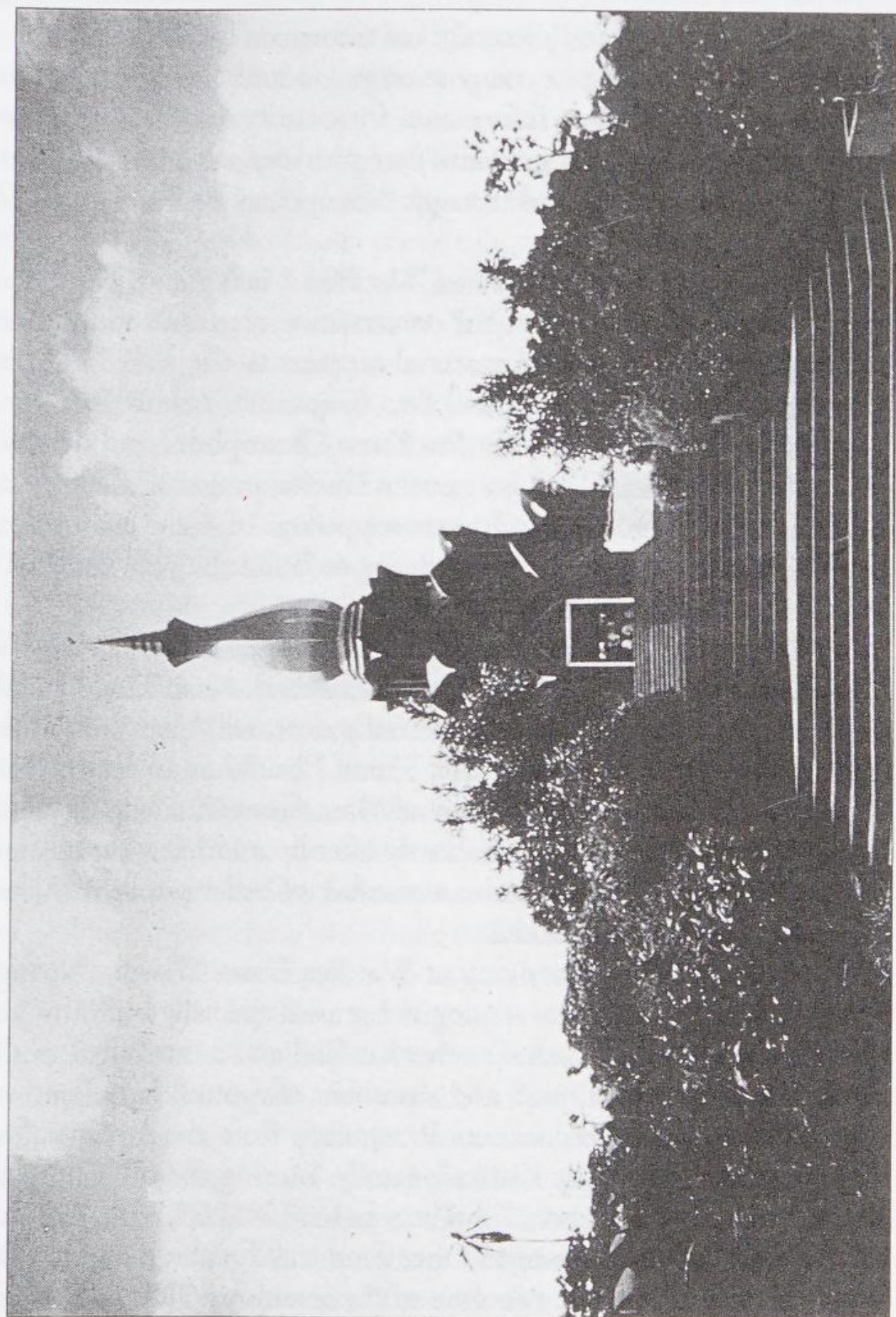
Juan Kulachettho's newly completed *jedii* rising above the sparse Maekhong plain cost over 10 million baht (US\$384,615), most of the support coming from fund-raising initiated by the Electricity Generating Authority of Thailand (EGAT) Buddhist Association led by its recently retired senior executive Mrs Suriiphan Maniiwat (discussed later). Suriiphan has for a number of years organized annual merit-making tours to the monastery which take in a number of other well-known parent forest monasteries. At the time of writing the *jedii* was still not yet finished and because of increasing costs Suriiphan had to raise private funds to keep the work going. Juan was highly regarded by the king who had great "faith" in the teacher and after his cremation was given most of the relics and ash which he took with him back to the palace (though promising to return them when the *jedii* was completed). According to informants, Suriiphan, as discussed later, has been trying for many years to solicit royal approbation and personal favour for her prominent tutelar role among the northeastern forest *arahan*.

Perhaps one of the most important sponsors of *jedii* in the northeast



PHOTOGRAPH 5

“Relic Museum” (*Jediiphiphithaphan*) for Ajaan Fan, Wat Paa Udomsomporn, Phannaanikhom District, Sakon Nakhorn





and long-time patron of forest monks in the tradition of Ajaan Man is the Norngkhaai-based entrepreneur, Kimkai<sup>12</sup> and his family. Kimkai, a local Member of Parliament, initially made his fortune wheeling and dealing across the Maekhong and presently has numerous business ventures spread across the country. Despite many attempts to interview him, he was never available and, according to informants, for security reasons is secretive about his movements. Kimkai's grandmother provided support for Ajaan Man when he occasionally passed through Norngkhaai on his way to Thaabor district.

At Wat Tham Klongphen and Wat Hin Maak Peng, Kimkai contributed a great deal of money to the construction of various monuments and buildings. He also provided material support to the *jedii* for Ajaans Jan Khemapatto, Orn Yaanasiri, and Bua Siripunno. A new *jedii* for Ajaan Singthorng Thammawaro (Wat Paa Kaew Chumphon) and nearby Ajaan Suphat (Wat Paa Baan Taai) is a current Kimkai project at the time of writing. Seemingly, Kimkai's family were supporters of Ajaan Juan prior to his untimely death in 1980 and were going to build the *jedii* but lost out to EGAT's Buddhist Association.

In the past ten years Kimkai's family supported Ajaan Chorp (Wat Paa Khokmon), Ajaan Bunjan (Wat Paa Santikaawaat), Ajaan Thui Chanthakaro (Wat Paa Daan Wiwek), and the recently deceased Ajaan Lui Jantasaaro (Wat Tham Phaabing and at Wat Tham Phuukhaa in Sakon Nakhorn associated with a lesser-known pupil of Man, Ajaan Kuu, who died in 1953) until he was taken to Bangkok shortly after by another wealthy supporter mentioned later. There were also a number of other pupils of Ajaan Man under the patronage of Kimkai.

During the time of my stay at Wat Paa Daan Wiwek, Norngkhaai, Kimkai's younger sister was staying in her own specially built hut (*kuti*) in the *mae chii's* section. Kimkai's other kin had also contributed to the construction of a monastery wall and a number of monks' *kuti*. Food supplies at this isolated monastery are sent in regularly from the provincial town of Norngkhaai organized by Kimkai's family. During the official opening of Ajaan Khamdii Paphaaso's 7 million baht (US\$269,230) *jedii* in Loei, Kimkai's relatives had arranged a free food stall for the many hundreds of weary lay visitors over the two days of the ceremony. The *jedii* was opened by the governor of Loei and one of the King's esteemed Privy Councillors (Ong Khamontrii), Dr Chao na Siilawan (see mention later). In fact this ceremony held in December 1989 was the largest single gathering of



northeastern Phra Kammathaan monks in many years. It was also well attended by high-ranking *pariyat* monks from Wat Noranaat and Wat Raatchabophit in Bangkok, as if to affirm the indubitable links with the centre. Well over 400 monks (twenty to thirty of these famous forest teachers from around the northeast) came to pay respects to Khamdii and participate in joint religious rituals.

According to the present abbot of Wat Jantaraaraam, not far from the town of Norngkhaai, Ajaan Jan Khemapatto was first invited by Kimkai to reside there in 1970. Jan had been previously staying at Wat Phuuwiang in Chaiyaphuum. The intention behind Kimkai's patronage was, as asserted by the present abbot of the monastery, to "help" (perhaps discreetly and indirectly) in his business ventures by providing suggestions on fortuitous dates and numbers (*hai reuk*). Seemingly, Kimkai, like many similarly powerful individuals, sought the patronage of forest monks (*Phra thiimiicheusiang*) who were reputed to have considerable stores of merit powers which, when inflexed and transformed in the downward spiral from spiritual sanctity (what Tambiah [1984, p. 336] would have called "vulgar materialization") can be used for worldly gain. Thus, as the above example shows, many forest monks have wealthy and influential patrons seeking moral averment and certitude, confirmation of success, and good fortune. Self-made millionaire Chalieu Yuuwithayaa (mentioned in Chapter Nine) is another example, a keen supporter of Ajaan Wan Uttamo and sponsor for the 6 million baht (US\$230,770) *jedii* standing near the top of a large mountain forest reserve (*paa sa-nguan*) overlooking the now stark surrounding countryside.

After *jedii* have been built at forest monasteries during the terminal phase, hitherto prolific support starts to dwindle and to be diverted elsewhere, with many parent monasteries struggling to maintain their upkeep. At Wat Doi Maepang in Phrao district, Chiang Mai, two years after the death of Luang Puu Waen Sujinno (1888–1986), there were few indicators of either its primitive origins or the vigour and height of its popularity in the late 1970s. Local sellers of photograph reproductions, amulets, flowers, and incense along the largely deserted rows of empty stalls are not so active these days. The abbot, Ajaan Nuu Sujitto, spent millions of baht on now-empty buildings in preparation for the nationally broadcast two-day ceremony attended by the royalty and some of the nation's highest-ranking dignitaries. The central *mondop* (Pali: *mandapa*, literally, temporary hall) holding Waen's relics, life-like wax figure and personal monk-requisites was built by a wealthy Thai-Chinese physician from Bangkok, Dr Amon Mahaphatthanaangkuun.



The Railways Authority of Thailand sponsored Waen's expensive *kuti* situated opposite his original simple wooden shingle dwelling. The king donated funds for the beautiful *bot*, though these days there are often too few monks in residence for the performance of the fortnightly ritual "acts of the *sangha*" (*sangkhakam*). The contrast is sharp compared with either the bustling, heady days when convoys of luxury motor vehicles were coming and going and large community of wandering monks staying close to the teacher, and the beginning phase when Man and his northeastern pupils Ajaans Sim, Teur, Khao, and others encamped in the teak forest during their period of wandering in the north. But from this group of northeastern monks it was Waen, finding peace and solitude at Doi Maepang, who finally stayed on. Thus for analysis, as I shall come to shortly, I have defined forest monasteries in a number of distinct diachronic modalities or evolutionary phases.

At Wat Paa Udom Somphorn in Sakon Nakhorn, Ajaan Fan's *jedii* is giving the present abbot something of a headache to maintain, especially with its extensive landscaped gardens. Donation boxes (*klornglapborijaak*) have started to appear, something which would have been abhorred by the teacher fifteen years ago. The monastery is now an important tourist attraction and bus loads of villagers and urban merit-makers make pilgrimage to Fan's *jedii*. The monastery has now become the district centre for the Thammathuut missionary monks, which reflects its new institutional image. Once a year, on the full moon of the second lunar month (January) the monastery has a commemorative ceremony for Fan, an event which attracts hundreds of monks and sightseers. At the time of my attendance, two of Fan's former senior pupils, the popular Ajaans Suwat Suwajjo and U-Thai, were the centre of attention over the two days of the ceremony.

A similar problem of maintenance support was also felt at Ajaan Khao's former monastery, Wat Tham Klongphen, according to its abbot, Bunpheng Khemaaphirato. These above case-studies are some examples where prolific ritual merit-making has been drastically reduced, leaving a complex infrastructure which many of the early monks did not in any case particularly want, especially electricity and telephones. Besides donation boxes, the last resort seems to be selling cheap artefacts, "blessed water", pictures of the deceased master, medallions, and the like. But then in a wider sense this has long been a feature of Buddhist Southeast Asia where the landscape is potted with *jedii*, indigenous Buddhalogical sacra. The establishment of *jedii* throughout the northeast has had the purpose of sanctifying and legitimating religious sites in the far provinces in a direct line to the centre and king as



the guardian of *dhamma*, the *Thammaraachaa*.

The construction of *jedii* for deceased *arahan* has its basis in the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta* (*Digha-nikaya*, II, 142 [Rhys Davids and Rhys Davids 1977]) where the Buddha reputedly declared that an *arahan* (or even a righteous world ruler) should be buried under a *jedii*. This was pursued with enthusiasm by pious Buddhist kings, becoming a feature of popular religiosity (Gadjin 1980, pp. 193–94). In the *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, the Buddha told Ananda shortly before his demise,

through what special benefit Ananda is an Ariya Disciple (*Phra-ariyasaawok*) ... worthy of a Stupa? Ananda many people will feel reverence in their minds [reflecting] that “this is a stupa of an Ariya Disciple of ... [the] Buddha”. After the death and dissolution of these people who feel such reverence and devotion ... they will be reborn in a good destination [heaven].<sup>13</sup>

Gombrich (1988, p. 122) remarks that this text has long served as a charter for Buddhist pilgrimage (see also Pruess 1976a, pp. 173–76). This neatly summarizes the present devotional attitude by Thai towards *jedii* of their indigenous *arahan* and perceived merit increment through participating in construction works. *Jedii* have long been the foci of competing merit-making interests (institutional and private) among the nation’s plutocrats, individuals seeking everted potent religious symbols (as merit-imbued conceptions) for “this-worldly” aspirations. Mahaa Bua, the present paternal figure of the forest norm, bemoaned the fact that today people do not know the purpose of a *jedii*, which doctrinally is to pay respects to the great *ariya* teachers (*ariyabukkhan*), disciples in a timeless lineality to the Buddha and model of transcendent reality. But then merit-power pervades these sacred sites in which are fused certain universal symbols and thus, *ipso facto*, are the locus of public veneration (as merit-making).

Those parent monasteries mentioned above, and others in the line of Ajaan Man, were active “practising” residencies for ascetic monks not so long ago in the “settlement” phase. Some of these monasteries became either institutional *pariyat* centres or *wat baan* (“village monasteries”), catering for the ritual needs of an agricultural community. At some of these now-domesticated monasteries, the resident novices and monks could not even remember the founding teacher or had little interest in the monastery’s inchoation. The links are clearly outside of institutional form in the personalized face-to-face pupillary lineage, and once the teacher dies and pupils



disperse, the monastery ceases to have any symbolic significance to forest monks.

In time even the teacher's *jedii*, that classic locus of sanctity, will likewise fade into obscurity (despite what the present devotees say). Some of the once-assiduous, active centres for forest monks are now either taken over by the domesticated *sangha* or left to the elements, gathering dust with fading lineage photographs eaten by termites in the communal hall (*saalaa*) now housing tarnished Buddha images, and in the monks' grounds (*sangkhaawaat*) overgrown forest tracks and once well-trodden meditation paths (*jongkram*; Pali: *cankama*) in receding circumjacent forest — all part of the changing scenario in the forest monastic tradition. The remaining ascetic monks have now gone deeper into the last frontier areas, to small pockets of forest further from the provincial towns and less spoilt *samnak* which themselves one day will doubtlessly go the same way as their parent monasteries, an emergent phase which bespeaks finality, and a *commencement de la fin*.

#### FREE-FLOATING CHARISMA AND THE WANDERING REGIMEN

Many of the more charismatic forest teachers became well-known in the latter part of their lives because of acclaimed mystical powers (*ittthirit*), supernatural abilities (*aphinihaan*), and apotropaism.<sup>14</sup> Manich (1973, pp. 22–23) wrote that the villagers conceive forest monks as “very sacred and possessing supernatural powers because of their stringent and austere life”. As I have mentioned earlier, this accounts largely for their popularity as in the well-known story of Luang Puu Waen. In the late 1960s, an airforce pilot noticed a monk sitting on the clouds meditating and when he returned to base made enquiries which revealed that it could only have been over Wat Doi Mae Pang where Waen was staying. Since that time Waen became famous and tales passed around and multiplied. Not long before his death, when asked about this mystifying tale and whether it was him sitting on the clouds, Waen dryly replied, “You think I’m a bird?”. But seemingly he never actually denied it and so the story remains in the minds and hearts of many Thai Buddhists.<sup>15</sup>

The popularity of forest monks is connected with the lay search (whether for personal, communal-political, or economic reasons) for particular individuals possessing unusual leadership characteristics, albeit within a defined cultural framework and notions of the sacred. But the important factor, as



Weber (1968, p. 48) points out, was in the "recognition" by devotees of the personal attributes of the charismatic leader (setting the individual apart from his contemporaries). Thus charisma (or "power" in general) cannot exist independently as an "energetically manifested ability" (Fogelson and Adams 1977, p. 389), but must be recognized by others as well as the individual possessing it. If the charismatic individual can

introject his new followers' definitions of him and fulfil in his behaviour and appearance their (flexible) expectations, he might ... according to his abilities, become a certain kind of religious leader. (Irvine 1982, p. 253)

Forest monks have ample opportunity of gaining followers at various impact points in the countryside because of their peripatetic life-style. In the close confines of their three-month rains retreat (*phansaa*) the relationship between master and pupil (if staying together) is cemented, forest monks meet together at regular intervals for listening to a sermon by the teacher. Because of their traditional wandering life-style during the dry season, forest monks come into regular contact with villagers, although cursory and largely monochromatic (as in receiving alms-food, giving a short homily, and moving on). At the village interface reciprocity in social relations is minimized, lest forest monks have to compromise the ascetic or "contemplative" ideals which they profess and are considered by many as exemplars.

The regimen of wandering (*doen thudong*) has long been a crucial feature of the forest monk and symbol of asceticism. From surveys at forty-three northeastern forest monasteries in twelve provinces, it was revealed that some 68 per cent of respondents regularly go *thudong* every year for varying duration. Most indicated that the preferred time to leave the monastery was shortly after the *phansaa* in October, whilst others preferred to wait any time from November to early the following year, returning (or staying at any site) from May to late June to prepare for the coming rains' residence. Reasons given by respondents for undertaking seasonal wandering included the following: to follow one's teacher as in the tradition and practice of famous forest monks; to cultivate fortitude (*phian*), patience, and endurance; to find a quiet place and develop "knowledge" (*khwaamruu*) and meditation; as a religious duty expected of forest monks (*bamphen-bun*); to strengthen the "mind" (*jit-jai*) and overcome conation or "desires"; to establish wisdom and to seek detachment. There was no consistency in responses as to destination which included forested areas throughout Thailand and one elderly respondent even said Laos. There was a suggestion by some respondents that



they now have to go further afield to seek forests because of the rapid deforestation in the northeast, which I shall return to in the next chapter.

Monks during wandering will be walking by themselves or in small bands in single file (see Photograph 6). They will be wearing well-used patched ochreous robes<sup>16</sup> the colour of burnt mustard, water bottle or kettle hanging on one side, monks' meditation umbrella (*klot*) over the shoulder, alms-bowl, and bag. It may be noted that the alms-bowl (*baat*) is normally larger than the standard type found in village and town monasteries and serves to facilitate longer alms-round and act as a repository when wandering. These monks may or may not be wearing sandals and their skin would be dark from constant exposure to the elements. Their attention would be focused according to "proper" manner intensely on the path a short distance ahead (textual tradition mentions a "plough length", or 1.5 to 2 metres).

There is no doubt the practice of wandering on foot<sup>17</sup> for many monks is still part and parcel of the forest life, although decreasingly relevant these days with the disappearing forests, intrusive infrastructure, and corresponding settled residency pattern of forest monks (as a general process of circumvallation, as mentioned in Chapter One).

In the first instance the forest life was essentially bimodal, consisting of rains residence and dry-season wandering. But there have been definitive changes to this traditional pattern since the early decades of the twentieth century. In three earlier chapters I discussed in some detail the life and times of Ajaan Man and his contemporaries to show the analogical pattern and variance in the forest life ways over two generations of lineage teachers. Except for the rains, forest *thudong* monks were on the move, though on occasions staying in secluded monasteries or caves not far from hamlets. Come the rains period, they would either have temporary shelters built for them by villagers or else move to stay at established forest monasteries or at town monasteries of the appropriate *nikaai*.

Since the 1930s, forest meditation teachers in Man's reform lineage started to gain large followings and many were subsequently invited by local supporters (with the sanction of the ecclesiastical and civil establishment, although seemingly often as a *fait accompli*) to establish *samnak* at the outskirts of villages. As we have seen, it often happened that forest monks were not permitted to stay by the local authorities and thus had to move on. Those *samnak* which were set up would start with rough temporary shelters called *raan* or *laan* which were simply bamboo platforms with thatched rice-straw roof or leaves and a cleared, slightly raised walkway in front or by the side



PHOTOGRAPH 6

Forest Monks on Seasonal *Dhutanga* Wandering (*Doen Thudong*)



On the left, Mahaanikaai; on the right, Thammayut — both in the tradition of Ajaan Man



of around twenty to thirty paces in length — the essential *jongkrom* path (the main feature distinguishing practice monasteries from non-meditation monasteries). Some *laan* were fitted with removeable bamboo sides, or rolled-up canvas which could be let down during the night time. The *klot* (with its fitted mosquito net) was hung from the ceiling inside the *laan*, where the meditator would spend most of his time except when on the *jongkrom* path.

Forest or vacant land would usually be offered to forest monks either by the villagers or, if near to the town by a wealthy patron (by and large in the northeast, of Thai-Chinese descent). The *samnak* from its humble origins would then start to develop (as we saw in the case of Wat Aranyawaasii in Chapter Four) and permanent dwellings constructed, starting with the monks' huts (*kuti*). These huts were small individual wooden constructions with wooden shingle, thatch, or corrugated iron roofs, sometimes only just large enough for the monk to lie down inside, raised off the ground. Around the support posts there would be rags soaked in sump oil to prevent ants climbing up as well as a small piece of tin sheet between the foundation posts and the building to counter the intrusion of termites. For similar reasons there would be a small gap between the hut itself and the steps. After the huts, there would be a non-officially sanctified *saalaa* constructed from timber in the forest, built in a clearing on a rocky outcrop where the small band of monastic inmates would eat collectively after alms-round, gather for religious rituals, or receive guests.

Even during the early days of the formation of *samnak*, a great deal of walking was necessary, sometimes taking many days from the main road to reach the forest *samnak*. In the time of Man on rare occasions monks would travel by oxen cart (normally sick or elderly monks as there is a *vinaya* restriction on being in an animal-drawn vehicle) but more commonly on foot. The caudal phase of the primitive wandering regimen has been facilitated by the construction of roads extending into isolated villages in the periphery, together with the imposition of the macro society and political constraints, which I shall return to later.

Terwiel<sup>18</sup> correctly points out that Mahaanikaai town monks in central Thailand also have their own tradition of occasional dry-season treks to visit certain Buddhalogical sites. Yet this practice is an influence of the ancient *thudong* (Pali: *dhutanga*) regimen. The *dhutanga* (see Appendix C) relate to the practices of collecting and eating food, places of abode and physical posture, and have throughout Theravadin *sangha* history (at least from the early Christian era) tended to set forest-dwelling monks apart from the



mainstream clergy. These austerities and corresponding separation and individualistic life ways have given the forest monks a reputation of respectful fear and even mistrust by both the ecclesia and the laity.

Manich (1973, pp. 22–23) portrays forest monks as “pilgrims” who spend their time wandering from village to village in the dry season; though in fact it is highly unlikely that forest monks would make the village their destination unless in passing on their way to forest monasteries. Yet, in times past they would encamp on the fringe of isolated settlements where alms could be secured and seclusion maintained.

The practice of wandering is normally undertaken by forest monks for three reasons. The first reason is to be able to dwell in isolated places for intensive meditation practice, areas which necessitate a great deal of walking. Since the rapid expansion of cash-cropping and corresponding deforestation in the 1960s many of the traditional *dhutanga* sites in the northeast have disappeared. As well, wandering across the Maekhong has not been sanctioned since political events led to the neighbouring communist victory in the mid-1970s. In fact in neighbouring Laos today the fate of forest monks is not clear although we can assume that they either came across to the northeast permanently, disrobed or were absorbed into the tightly regulated and politicized national *sangha*.

The second reason for dry-season wandering (*doen thudong*) is to be able to visit meditation masters situated in other secluded parts of the countryside (wandering monks may also take this opportunity to decide in which forest monastery to spend the coming rains retreat). In this regard, monks remarked that there is a sense of personal accomplishment to arrive on foot after a lengthy and arduous journey. Wandering is also common practice between branch monasteries or affiliated *samnak* under a particular teacher. Then again, forest monks may have the specific intent of setting out on a journey to attend an official *jedii* opening or memorial service for a deceased master. This latter aspect blends in with the third reason for wandering, which is to undertake a “pilgrimage” to well-known shrines of Buddhalogical and national significance,<sup>19</sup> though these monks are more likely to be domesticated monks from the town and another point of convergence with the *dhutanga* tradition. These “pilgrim” monks as one informant<sup>20</sup> said, are tenuously connected with “proper” forest dwelling and are noticeable today at sacred sites throughout the country, as at Saraburii or Thaat Phanom.<sup>21</sup>

Pruess (1976a, p. 196) observes wandering monks visiting the Thaat Phanom shrine to pay respects to the sacred relics (popularly believed to



contain those of the Buddha and 500 *arahan* including Maha Kassapa) on their way to distant forest monasteries. Northeastern forest monks, including Man, have in fact long venerated the Thaata Phanom shrine. Toem (1970, p. 685) says that Man and Sao with another monk, Upatchaa Taa, passed Thaata Phanom in 1905 whilst on *thudong*. They were apparently so impressed by the sacred site that on their return journey to Ubon they asked Phra Khruu Udompitaak-khanadet at Wat Thuang Sii Meuang to renovate the then-dilapidated *jedii*. This was the start of later reconstruction on the sacred monument.

Due to changing conditions in the countryside, the wandering tradition today is weak as forest monks told me. Furthermore, a *thudong* monk at the time of Man was one who observed faithfully *dhutanga* practices at various meditation sites. Because now there are few suitable secluded sites, the forest monk is more likely to remain more or less permanently attached to the forest monastery or its branches. One informant said that monks seen on the road today are more likely to be “clerical tourists” than “proper” *dhutanga* practitioners. Indeed, apeing the ascetic monks’ tradition has had a appeal among ordinary monks in recent times. Another reason given for the decline in wandering was that there are too many “distractions” (*mii sing yuayu phaaainork*) for the lone monk. Then what happened to the ascetic wanderers in the northeast? Most presently choose to remain behind the thin curtain of forest surrounding the monks’ dwellings, others journey from one influential patron’s residence at peri-urban *samnak* to another (see Chapter Eight on the metropolitan *samnak* connection), being kept in a state of perennial patronage. These mainly now-elderly pupils of Man tend to maintain contact with a coterie of elite lay supporters who feel they are protecting them from the debilitating ravages of popular religiosity.

Bunnag (1973, pp. 54–55) notes from her field-work in Ayutthayaa that forest monks are commonly thought of as “pilgrims” who spend much of their time visiting well-known shrines; they were not conceived as meditation monks. C. Reynolds (1972, p. 10) similarly makes a connection between forest monks in the central provinces and pilgrimage. The *thudong* monks in central Thailand as related by both Bunnag and O’Connor (1978, p. 148) were somewhat unorthodox, inhabiting central market-places, dabbling in astrology, theurgy, and divination. But Bunnag does acknowledge that there are “hermit” monks who live more or less permanently in the northeastern forests, a feature seemingly absent in the central provinces (*ibid.*, p. 55 n.). By appearance both kinds of “wandering monks” may be



similar to the casual observer, but at least in soteriologies they are far apart. Then again, the above studies were limited and thus misleading by lack of access to forest-dwelling monks of the northeastern *dhutanga* tradition. Bunnag's comment (see also Dutt 1966, p. 81) that the Thai community see these monks as "not properly integrated into the monastic community" needs some explication, and in any case would not apply to Man's present-day northeastern lineage.

Placzek (1981) makes the essential distinction between *thudong* monks who were not affiliated to the northeastern forest tradition and those who he regarded as "true" forest monks. The former were

often young men who temporarily ordained and travelling more or less on a pleasure outing, or ... entrepreneurial types intent upon parlaying the *thudong* mystique into profitable fortune-telling or love potion business. (Ibid., p. 164)

Ajaan Chaa supposedly referred to these monks as *thalu-dong*, implying that they just "pass through" (*thalu*) the forest on their way to village or town to engage in their dubious activities (ibid., p. 182). In fact some of these "sham forest monks" can be seen in the northeast going from ceremony to ceremony (*ngaan*) held annually for deceased forest masters, taking pickings from the generous donations at these well-attended events. It will be found that most practising monks tend to avoid these ceremonies which may last for two days, or else they will make a brief appearance as a show of respect and then disappear. As Zack (1977, p. 220) notes, because of the attraction by the laity to wandering ascetic monks, "masquerading" as such was a means to an easy livelihood not only as recipients of generous merit offerings at *ngaan*, but more seriously implying possession of *aphinihaan*. The laity is quick to ratify and enunciate mystical attributes and is always on the look-out for "special" monks able to forecast lucky numbers.

One Thammayut forest monk I met in Sakon Nakhorn had wandered from Khorn Kaen (Wat Udomkhongkhaa-khiiriikhet) to Mukdaahaan on the Maekhong (Wat Phuu Jorkor), then to Sakon Nakhorn to spend a few months at Wat Doi Thammajedii. These are all monasteries affiliated to pupils of Man: Ajaans Phaang Jittakutto (first generation), Laa (second generation and disciple of Mahaa Bua), and Baen Thanaakaro (second generation and former pupil of the late Kongmaa Jirapunyo). The journey took this wanderer over two months during which time he pitched his *klot* on the outskirts of villages and isolated hamlets or stayed in cemeteries. He



explained to me that the villagers generally treated him with deference, and were always willing to offer food on alms-round. His feet were severely blistered when I talked to him, otherwise he was in good health and looked forward to the later return trek to his parent monastery in Khorn Kaen in time for the rains retreat. This monk explained to me that in the Man tradition, disciples were not permitted to wander footloose around the countryside but only with the intent to undertake meditation practice or visit forest teachers. In any case monks were not permitted by many teachers to wander alone until they have at least five rains under direct pupillage, a normative “dependency” (*nissai*) requirement.<sup>22</sup> I should add that these were monks of both Mahaanikaai and Thammayut appertaining to a monastic sodality which Khantipalo (1965, pp. 68–69) referred to as resembling the primeval *bhikkhu-sangha*, the forest way “first among other modes of *bhikkhu* life”.

#### SANCTITY “OUT THERE”; THE SEARCH FOR OBJECTIFIED CHARISMA

In the framework of his urban study, O'Connor (1978, p. 134) conceived the forest tradition as antipodal to the metropolis with its traditional regal sanctity, separated (spatially and symbolically) from the peripheral meditation monks in their “magical sanctity”. Forest monks earning purity through consistent practice and separation from the tainted worldly domain, were popularly viewed as engaged in non-normative practices through mystical gnosis. This was connected to personal powers and abilities accrued from their “indigenous magical sanctity”. Throughout Thai history this has led to a dialectical relationship between the two complementary social fields, though somewhat destructive of the forest monks’ peripheral habitat. In some cases this entailed an evasive and defensive strategy where forest monks tried to maintain their distance and separation. When there was no more space to move about, forest monks strategically became vulnerable to the intrusion and control of the wider social order and through a process of abscission and circumvallation, the monastery became significant for perpetuation and preservation of the forest life ways.<sup>23</sup>

In the eyes of the power élite, their fertile patronage to forest monks was a means of circumscribing the micro social field of the forest monks (as homeostasis) and, as a consequence, stabilize the tenuous and fragile balance between forest monks and intense popular interest. But these individuals



eventually undermined the immured life ways which they had originally sought to protect. The monastic frontiersmen eventually became routinized cenobites with the proffering of permanent monastic dwellings, considered by their supporters as a superlative act of merit-making (as when the Buddha's *sangha* was first offered residential monasteries, declared by the master in the *Cullavagga* (*Vinaya*, V) to be the principal gift to the *sangha*).

The interest in meditation among literate urban supporters led many to seek out reclusive teachers in the northeast. Meditation in Thailand is popularly associated with the search for magic, and its powers (*itthirit*) including retrocognition, precognition, and mind-reading (*yaan*).<sup>24</sup> In this view, meditation is simply equated with these "levels of power", a crude materialization of things which the "higher level" (world renouncer) accepts more in terms of symbolic value (Mendelson 1965, p. 219). According to northeastern forest monks, concentration meditation (*samaathi phaawanaa*), which is normally linked to "supra-knowledge" (*aphinyaa*), when harnessed by morality (*siin*) and perspicuous understanding (*panyaa*; pertaining to the Buddha's truths) can lead the practitioner to the liberating norm itself. The mystical attributes of forest monks are seen purely as a by-product of the normative path, of the practitioner's spiritual progress.<sup>25</sup> They are attained by the practitioner in his pursuit of the higher levels of consciousness, transcending and encompassing "the lower realms of materiality and causality" (Tambiah 1987a, p. 115).

As I have shown in earlier chapters, forest teachers have on the whole been concerned with eradicating the thaumaturgical elements of popular religion and "recapture an earlier, purer form of Buddhism" (Irvine 1982, p. 234). But textual accounts on the lives of forest monks abound with incredible feats, though with normative underpinnings. Man, like his contemporaries, believed in an active spirit world, but one that was always liable to be tamed by the logic and power of pristine *dhamma*. The universal canonical tradition itself has an expansive cosmology, as we can see from monastery wall paintings and the fourteenth century *Traiphuumikhaathaa*. Man, like the Buddha subduing Mara, would keep his mantra "Phut'tho" with him, and when faced with dangers would use it to pacify and win over these negative forces to the side of universal *dhamma*.

Popular tales abound pertaining to the mystical prowess (*saksit*) of forest monks which finds expression also in the "cult of amulets" (*phra khruang* or *khruang raang*), objects supposedly sacralized from their aggregated virtues and intrinsic charisma. Although most forest teachers consider participation



with amulets as frippery and demeaning for the “purist” vocation, this had not prevented well-known *kammathaan* monks from participating in the amulet cult (my reasoning will become clear further on). The pupils of Ajaan Man as adherents of the “reformed interpretation of the discipline” (O’Connor 1980, p. 35) emphasize praxis, direct realization, and, like the Buddha, discourage their disciples from becoming distracted by magical side-shows.

As many forest monks explained, although they accepted that participation in amulets and other sanctified ritual artefacts may be non-normative (according to the ascetic tradition), the Buddha’s discourse was set at different modes according to the comprehension of his listeners. Thus giving out amulets may be appropriate with certain persons, albeit a gross level of dispensation. In Thailand it is considered fortunate and prestigious to have in one’s possession an amulet “blessed” by a forest monk because, as Tambiah (1984, p. 342) explains, it represents (indexically and metonymically) a “materialization of his virtue”.<sup>26</sup>

Famous forest monks such as Ajaans Phaang, Sii, Fan, Khao, Juan, and Waen were known to have dispensed amulet-medallions (*rian*) at one time or another and in all cases in the latter part of their lives when their control over the surge of lay devotion seemed to be slipping or taken out of their hands by ambitious assistant monks. The point is that these early monks were only famous since the late 1960s and early 1970s, during a period of domestic insecurity in the northeast and national prosperity in the capital when many wealthy supporters (individuals and institutions) were eager to sponsor the production of amulet-medallions. It should be borne in mind that the amulet fetish is largely a concern of the urban-educated élite and, as Klausner (1985) remarks, rarely involves the northeastern villagers. After batches of amulets were minted in the metropole it required only the opportune moment for presenting them to the teacher for sanctification (by touch, breath, sprinkling of “blessed” water or *khaathaa* chant). Then the laity would arrange for marketing, such as fund-raising for developments in the monastery, or distribution on birthdays of prominent individuals, office openings, and so on.

Sometimes disciples close to the master would hand out medallions to privileged lay visitors, and even occasionally the teacher himself, a very personalized ritual between giver and receiver creating a sense of “fraternal love” (Geary 1986, p. 183). One of Man’s first-generation pupils Ajaan Ornsaa Sukhakaro (Wat Paa Baan Norng Yai, Udorn) told me that the laity make



the amulets, give them to the monks who in turn (in order to dispose of them) hand them back sacralized (a transformative and circuitous process) to the laity in a ritualized cycle, the amulet taking on its own "life history" (Kopytoff 1986, pp. 66–68). I found that rarely (*contra* Tambiah 1984, p. 384 n. 2) would a forest monastery sponsor the production and sacralizing of amulets of its own teacher. In only one case in the northeastern forest tradition do I know of this happening for fund-raising after the death of its teacher (Orn Yaanasiri, at Wat Paa Nikhrothaaraam). Likewise, I could find no evidence to suggest generally that forest teachers had been actively or co-operatively involved in being "iconically represented" on amulets (cf. Tambiah 1984, p. 260).

Ajaan Khao Anaalayo, mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, had in the last remaining years of his life been approached incessantly by devotees to sanctify batches of his amulets. After Khao's death, the abbot of the monastery where Khao resided, Ajaan Bunpheng Khemaaphirato, reputedly distributed freely amulet-medallions to incoming lay devotees. Once when Mahaa Bua (his monastic senior in terms of *phansaa*) found out he disposed of the many amulets behind Bunpheng's back. Mahaa Bua had been close to Khao and was given the task of writing his biography. In another case, Ajaan Fan Aajaro, very much the "people's saint", would on occasions give out amulets (see also Tambiah 1984, p. 139). His first batch were produced by the Royal Thai Airforce in 1964. According to the prominent physician Dr Ouay Ketsing<sup>27</sup> who visited him around this time, Fan also gave his amulets to the police and army fighting communist insurgents in the nearby Phuuphaan, as did Waen Sujinno later in 1971. Yet from this I would not conclude that the disbursement of amulets *per se* was politically motivated within the social complexity of giving. During the period of intense internal unrest the king went to see Ajaan Khao, whose monastery was situated in the Phuuphaan and asked him what the greatest problem facing the country was. To the surprise of onlookers (expecting him to say "insurgency"), Khao in a muted criticism of Thai institutions replied that it was national "greed" and "corruption".

#### SACRED RELICS AND POPULAR SAINTS

Perhaps the most controversy in recent times pertains to the sacred relics (*Phrathaat*; Pali: *saririka-dhatu*) of saints (*arahān*). The question as to the nature of an *arahān* is a provocative and complex one, and though it is widely



believed that some forest meditation monks were in this normative category, others although fine meditation teachers, were not. Confirmation is seemingly found in the vitrified or crystallized bone fragments, capable under certain conditions of miraculous multiplication. It is regarded as fortunate indeed (like medallions and other sacra blessed by famous forest monks mentioned above) to have in one's possession tiny grains of crystalline bone. Yet as a number of informants told me, crystallization does not normally occur with an *arahāṇ* unless they made a wish (*athit-thaan*) before death to convince incredulous people of the "truth" of the *arahāṇ* path and "fruits" of practice. There is also the popular belief that the process of transmogrification depends on when the monk actually attained *arahāṇship*. Therefore, if this was attained late in life, *Phrathaāt* may not be found immediately among the ashes as bone fragments may start to change some years after the cremation — as with Ajaans Orn, Fan, and Jan Khemapatto. In the case of Jan, devotees are still waiting thirteen years later, and in the mean time the ashes and bone fragments (*athi*) are kept in a jar on the shrine in the *saalaa* and occasionally inspected. Only a few of Fan's relics at the time of writing crystallized some eleven years after his death. Orn's remains have not yet crystallized at the monastery but a lay disciple claims to have some crystalline relics. In other cases, crystallization has occurred even with nail clippings and hair of living masters (such as Ajaans Waen and Khao).

Therefore we may conclude that it is not possible to argue over the issue as deceased forest monks may, whatever the external evidence, be *arahāṇ* (in any case there is always someone who has possession of remains which have transmuted to relics). The critical factor is that authentication of *arahāṇship* is dependent on public means of verification. The value attached to certain relics necessitated communal acceptance that an individual had during his lifetime been a pupil of Ajaan Man and that inference had been made by pupils close to the individual prior to his death of *arahāṇship*; accordingly, the remains of such a monk were to be ritually treated in a special way. For remains to be considered valuable, they had to undergo a social and cultural transition from being considered as "ordinary" to being venerated as the relics of an *arahāṇ*.

According to popular Sinhalese belief, the last *arahāṇ* died in the first century BC (Gombrich 1971, pp. 185–86; Carrithers 1983, p. 222), although the Pali commentaries and chronicles mentioned many cases of later "enlightened" monks (Gombrich 1988, p. 169). Rahula (1956) notes that the laity devised schemes to ascertain whether a monk (who in any case was not



expected to be totally free of minor defilements) was an *arahan* and that possession of supranormal powers was a complementary attribute (ibid., p. 229).<sup>28</sup>

One of the most well-known collectors of relics is the aforementioned Suriiphan, former Deputy General Manager (Phuuwaakaan) of the EGAT, prominent Bangkok socialite and former Member of Parliament. Her supernatural experiences with relics coming to her and multiplying are retold in a popular book *Maataabuuchaa* and in an article in the periodical on mysticism and monks *Lokthip*,<sup>29</sup> together giving wide readership. Suriiphan had been a dedicated relic hunter for many years and has in her possession crystallized remains of most of Man's *arahan* pupils including none other than the Buddha and two of his *arahan* disciples. In 1975 she had her first experience when an amulet of Ajaan Man and Sao fell out of thin air at her home. This started her on the trail of Man's forest monks after seeking confirmation from another long-time supporter of forest monks and fellow Member of Parliament, Dr Ouay Ketsing (mentioned above and in Chapter Eight). As if to endorse the merit of her find, Suriiphan brought a lottery ticket from numbers deduced from the relic multiplication and won first prize.

Yet Suriiphan's reputation was somewhat dented by her personal ambitions at the time of the combined cremation for Ajaans Wan, Juan, Singthorng, Suphat, and Bunmaa, who died in a plane crash on their way to a royal invitation at the palace in 1980. Three of these forest monks were first-generation pupils of Man, the other two (Singthorng and Suphat) second-generation disciples. Singthorng (born in 1924)<sup>30</sup> in particular was highly regarded in the northeast and widely considered an *arahan*. The story related to me was that Suriiphan wanted to obtain a royal "Khunying" title (placed before the first name of prominent females, as in "Lady ..."), which would have been virtually assured had she sponsored the cremation attended by the king.<sup>31</sup> However, Mahaa Bua was making the arrangements himself and, so the story goes, reputedly said in his usual direct fashion that a person should not behave like a "dog eating bones" over the remains of the dead teachers. But despite some ambivalence towards Suriiphan and her large well-organized merit-making tours in the northeastern forest monasteries, her early enthusiasm was shared among her staff at EGAT, leading to the formation of a Buddhist Association in 1978, headed by the then Finance Section Chief named Arii. The association was formally inaugurated in 1984 and has been active in promoting forest monks in the line of Ajaan Man,



organizing merit-making tours and meditation sessions, and publishing sermons and life accounts of well-known forest monks.<sup>32</sup> The Chairman of EGAT at the time of writing is the earlier-mentioned Dr Chao na Siilawan, a fervent supporter of forest monks (I shall return to Dr Chao in Chapter Eight).

Many rumours were circulating some years ago over the relics of Man's teacher Ajaan Sao who died in Jampaasak (Laos) in 1941. Sao's corpse was taken to Wat Buuraphaa in Ubon for cremation shortly after and his remains distributed and ground down by some of his pupils to make into composite personal amulets. When Man first heard about this from one of his pupils he was visibly displeased as were many of Man's pupils (Mahaa Bua 1986*b*, p. 287). After Man's death most of his inner core of disciples and visiting prominent delegates distributed his remains among themselves, though Mahaa Bua and one or two other disciples in his sub-lineage would have nothing to do with this and disappeared shortly after the ceremony. For these monks the relics had no obvious value aside from a very specific set of shared beliefs.

Thus there emerged among Man's followers two distinct tendencies in regard to relics and amulets, one the "purist", rationalist sodality and another tendency towards popular fetishism. This is what Tambiah (1984, pp. 258–59) mentions as the two modalities or "difference in emphasis" among Man's disciples. It is the latter modalities which, emulating Bodhisatta-like attributes, are more inclined to be involved in amulets through their "willingness to transfer ... blessings to humankind", yet at the same time are somehow able to remain detached from the "fruits" of their action. Tambiah goes on to say that although most of the forest teachers today are "dedicated to the ascetic and meditative regime" at the same time they "are not averse to blessing amulets or to devoting some part of their time to blessing, instructing, and relieving the distress of an ardent laity" (*ibid.*, p. 259). Whilst I have no problem with this comment, it should be added that in Tambiah's case-studies (Ajaans Fan, Waen, Juan, and Phaang) these popular monks' reputations were substantially honed by concession to lay demands. The distinction between the two seemingly contraposed modalities is not entirely clear-cut, as Tambiah later adds, as forest monks may "function at different levels and in different modes, according to context". Even the master himself, according to Tambiah, exhibited both tendencies (though seeming to contradict an earlier statement that this "polarization" was "not a notable cleavage in the Master" [*ibid.*, p. 135]).



It is clear in the first-hand accounts from Man's impact points in the north and the northeast that the polarization was not noticeable with the master. Indeed, Man was consistently the "exemplary virtuoso" throughout his life. Even as we have seen in earlier chapters, Man and his pupils were at times pedantically orthodox when it came to village beliefs and practice which deviated from the doctrinal norm.

However, I am not suggesting that all Man's pupils were in the same category; many realized that their community obligations were necessary. These obligations included missionizing and giving out auspicious dates, making *yan* (cloth or copper plates with mystical incantations inscribed on them), or conferring blessings with *joem* (white protective marks made with the fingers), and so on. One of Man's pupils, Ajaan Jan Khemapatto (as mentioned earlier in his relationship with Kimkai), was known for his popularistic interaction with villagers. During my interviews at Santhinimit village where the monastery is situated, many remembered Jan for participating in local religious rites and festivities. The present abbot of Jan's monastery remarked that Jan had his own reasons for his involvement in popular rituals, which on the surface could be misunderstood. He said that Jan was "higher" (*suungkhwa*) in *dhamma* than other monks and by involving himself in popular rites and rituals could, step-by-step in a tortile upward progression, bring the laity closer to the "purer" levels of the Buddha-*dhamma*. His *baaramii* (Pali: *parami*, ten stages of spiritual perfection leading to saintship) could permit him to do this and yet at the same time remain "untainted".

Another point in consideration is that there were many pupils of Man who could not emulate the master's "purism" *in toto*, which he had so impressionably stamped on forest-dwelling tradition in the first few decades of the twentieth century. After the death of Man there were increasing demands placed on his pupils by lay devotees which created an intrinsic tension in the life ways of these ageing monks and subsequent "social crisis". Monk-disciple after monk-disciple fell prey to the demands of an ardent enthusiastic and increasingly mobile laity, catering, in some instances, for their every whim out of solicitude and compassion. These monks would also neglect the important training of their own pupils and sit perennially awaiting the next batch of well-heeled tourists dispensing to them beatitude, felicitous *mettaa*, and exempla on the importance of keeping the moral precepts (*siin*). At the same time they may be asked for amulets, or perhaps to sacralize amulets brought with them, chant protective verses (*khaathaa*), or sprinkle the ubiquitous lustral water (*nammon*). The serious meditator (often less interested



in amulets as such) may ask to stay on at the monastery for a short retreat and in time more urban meditators will come (kin or work friends) and modernized conveniences (dormitories and Western-style toilets) would be constructed for them.

Ajaan Lii Thammatharo (n.d. [b]) mentions his occasional use of the above-mentioned popular ritual practices and use of the Buddha and *arahan* relics to impress his audience in the power of higher *dhamma*. Ajaan Sii Mahaawiuro (Wat Paa Kung, Roi Et) has a reputation for his method of conferring blessings on his visitors. When I visited him in 1985, before leaving my Thai friend asked him to “bless” us, which he did by blowing on our heads and rapidly mumbling *khaathaa*.

To prevent the commoditization of sacred relics by ardent relic hunters at least one famous teacher has left specific instructions on the disposal of his remains.<sup>33</sup> Another monk even mentioned that it would be better if he were not cremated. In medieval Europe, relics of living saints were so eagerly sought that the risk of murdering an ageing “holy man” in order to acquire his relics, or stealing the remains as soon as he was deceased, was ever-present (Geary 1986, p. 177). But for Thai Buddhists a more heinous crime would be hard to imagine and I mention this to emphasize the fervid value attached to sacralized and increasingly commoditized relics.

#### DIFFERENTIAL PROCLIVITIES, FOREST MONKS, AND THE CULT OF AMULETS

Forest monks differentiate the purist *arahan* soteriology with what Tambiah (1984, following Weber) calls the “tantric” orientation, that is, one whereby the

same virtuoso in his mental state of tranquillity, compassion, and loving-kindness, bearing a cosmic love for people at large ... [wants] to convey to them some part of his mystic experience and psychic conquests. (Ibid., p. 135)

Approximating this latter orientation, in the northeastern context there is a distinctive soteriology for individuals who reputedly made a conscious commitment to stop short from their own liberating norm in order to aspire to none other than Buddhahood in some remote future existence. These few benevolent ascetics, resisting standardization through ecclesiastical imbibition yet insisting on austerities as the means to serve the salvation of the masses,



are referred to as “wanting” (*praatanaa*) to be at the same “level” as a Buddha (*Phutthaphuum*, the “place” of the Buddha). For this “wanting”, the intent had to be made in a previous lifetime. *Phutthaphuum* in fact suggests a notion of an indigenized Bodhisatta-type prevalent in Northern Schools of Buddhism and, paradigmatically, the more activist northern Thai monk Khruubaa Siiwichai’s tradition — such as Phor Pan in his conscious attempt to emulate the Bodhisatta Vessantara (Cohen 1983, p. 105). Among north-eastern forest monks these individuals are more likely to be involved in the socialized dispensation of *mettaa*, ritual blessings, amulets, and concern with establishing extensive networks of pupils and monasteries. As well, some may be involved in proselytizing and teaching (*Phra nakthet*) at Man’s impact points in the countryside, rather than with single-minded introspective practice (though some may feel they can fulfill both demands).

Northeastern forest monks believed to be in this category include Man’s senior “right-hand” pupil Ajaan Sing Khantayaakhamo (Wat Paa Saalawan, Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa), who towards the end of his life became intensely preoccupied with establishing new *samnak* and consecrating monasteries for the Thammayut. According to the deputy-abbot of Sing’s monastery, Sing had made a clear statement before his death that he did not aspire to *arahan’ship* but instead *phutthaphuum*. The above-mentioned Ajaan Sii is assumed to be in this category and despite attempts to change his opinions, Man was not successful. Sii, in common with monks like him, had established a great many *samnak* or branch monasteries around the country. According to a popular story among forest monks, Man sent his most precise and trenchant disciple, Ajaan Bua Siripunno (1888–1975), to correct Sii’s “false views” but, after one night in the forest with Sii, he gave up in exasperation.

Bua, originally from Roi Et, had been a carpenter, married, with children and illiterate. He ordained late at the age of fifty-three in 1941 after following his mentor Ajaan Orn Yaanasiri as a *Taa Phaakhao* (an elderly lay disciple wearing white clothes and observing the eight precepts) to Khorn Kaen. Bua had also been a disciple of Ajaan Khamdii Phaphaaso when he stayed in Khorn Kaen (Khamdii was apparently his first teacher) (Siithon 1985). Khamdii in turn would later stay with Bua when the latter established his forest *samnak* at Norngwuasor district, Udornthaanii. He was regarded by Ajaan Khao as a “special” monk (*mii khong dii*) which some have taken to indicate Khao’s ratification that Bua (not to be confused with Mahaa Bua) was indeed an *arahan* (seemingly only another *arahan* can affirm this). Dr



Ouay, who met Bua in the 1960s, said that he was quiet, fierce, spoke little Central Thai, and disliked superstitious and animistic elements in popular religion.

Interestingly, both Khao and Bua, along with the first acclaimed *arahān* disciple of Man mentioned by Mahaa Bua (1986*b*, p. 342) named Phrom Jirapunyo (1891–1969), ordained late in life. All had life crisis of sorts which were motivating factors for their seeking the renunciant way (along with many other pupils of Man such as Kongmaa and Khrueng mentioned in Chapter Five). The trigger mechanism for Bua seeking the “way of the monk” took place when he was once harvesting rice and cut his hand. This caused him to reflect on the nature of the body, impermanence, and pain. I have already discussed how Khao came home after a period of absence to find his wife having an affair with another man in his house. It is to Man’s first saint-disciple Ajaan Phrom I now turn with a brief personal history.

Phrom was born at Taan village, Khoksii sub-district, Sawaang Daendin district in Sakon Nakhorn, and was a well-respected and prosperous trader and village headman. However, he resigned from the latter position over personal conflict with his understanding of *dhamma* (as a lay person Phrom had been profoundly influenced by Man’s early pupil Ajaan Saan). Phrom married early but his wife died during child-birth. He had desperately wanted children of his own and so his relatives arranged for his second marriage but, as fate would have it, his wife turned out to be barren. Phrom and his wife then ordained together and gave all of their personal possessions away to the villagers (including significant land holdings). An elderly *mae chii* at Phrom’s Wat Prasitthitham (Baandung district, Udon) who had lived with his wife before her death a few years ago, mentioned that at the beginning his wife doubted Phrom’s intentions as he wanted her to go off to Ubon to ordain first. She thought he was going to find another wife. He was thirty-seven years of age when he ordained under Mahaa Juum (Phra Thammajedii) at the Thammayut’s Wat Phothisomphon in Udon. Shortly afterwards, Phrom’s younger brother and sister followed his example and also ordained.

After ordaining Phrom undertook extensive wandering and went as far as Burma, into Laos, and various parts of the north and northeast. He eventually met up with Man in Chiang Mai, where Phrom — like his teacher before him — reputedly attained *arahānship*. He returned to Baandung district in Udonthaaanii province not far from his home district to settle and died at the age of seventy-nine. Less than one year after his cremation in 1971, his bone fragments were found to have crystallized. Phrom, and the



other monks mentioned above, were paradigmatic of the early *arahān* ideals; their lives were read as acts of courage and endurance leading to spiritual “liberation” (*wimutti*).

In contrast, informants’ comments on *phutthaphuum* (despite the fact that there was some conflation between the two modalities and that both were precisian in the *dhamma-vinaya*) were more or less derogatory, indicating an element of delusion (*khwaamlong*), mental “defilement” (*kilet*), and hindrance in the processual meditative regimen. However, in Mahaa Bua’s (1986a) biography on Man, the master in a previous lifetime aspired to *phutthaphuum* though eventually opting for the sublimity of *arahānship*, not wishing to delay *nipphaan* any longer. Thus the *arahān* norm, not surprisingly, is regarded as the pinnacle of the *bhikkhu* way, one who by his own efforts has managed to free himself from the world of stress or suffering, desires, and attachments.

Another way of coming to terms with the soteriological contradiction between *phutthaphuum* and *arahānship* as one monastic informant told me, is to see it as a tension between a monk’s own practice and sense of “duty” to others, a tension inherent in the canon itself. Ananda, the Buddha’s most dedicated pupil (as with Sing in his relationship with Man mentioned above) exemplifies the latter category of monks who, postponing their own liberating goal, become concerned with preserving the master’s teachings and making them accessible for the benefit of others as a missionary quest. Man did not encourage this but accepted these monks under certain conditions relating to religio-politics at the time. In another sense, the tension is inherent even among those assumed “perfected” monks known to have internalized the *dhamma* truths and the extent to which they should show the way to others (the *Pacceka-buddha* is self-perfection at its most radical expression; see Kloppenborg [1974]). The Buddha, it may be recalled, was not going to concern himself with pedagogy until the entreaty by the highest god persuaded him to communicate his knowledge to others. I suspect Man was also enmeshed at times in this dialectical tension with his own band of pupils and in teaching the laity (see Chapters Five and Seven).

The mobilization and standardization in the religio-political centre at the time posed something of a threat to the individualistic wanderers (as also in reverse). As explained to me, Man was astute enough to permit a few of his followers so inclined to take a front-line position in interaction with the state. I have shown in Chapters Four and Five how monk-apostolates of this category were responsible for promoting Man and his northeastern *kammathāan*



tradition to the ecclesia and the laity, and that this led to acquiescence and eventual institutionalization by the centre.

Because of associations with *arahan'ship* and related mystical powers attributed to relics of forest monks in the line of Ajaan Man, popular interest has bloomed in recent years (Ouay 1978, p. 3; O'Connor 1978, p. 150; Tambiah 1984, pp. 258, 344–45). These monks have been actively sought over the past twenty years for sacralizing amulets, although there is nothing new about this interest in seeking legitimating symbols and relic-cults in Thai history (as, for instance, in Maha Sumanā's relic find in fourteenth century Sukhothai) following Sinhalese tradition (Gosling 1983, pp. 181–83; O'Connor 1985, p. 11). Nevertheless, its resurgence in the 1970s reflects the growing insecurity and the moral dilemma faced by the centre as they increasingly turned to charismatic leaders and symbols as stereobate for the existing social and political order.<sup>34</sup> Tambiah (1984, pp. 344–45) makes this point and summarizes by saying that the present “intensification” of the amulet (or “relic”) cult, is symptomatic of a national crisis and a perceived need for personal and communal merit and universal goodwill (I shall return to this social and political crisis again in Chapter Nine). It is these latter qualities which forest monks (especially the more charismatic “popular saints”) are able to overspread in their interaction with lay devotees.

In an article in the *Nation* daily newspaper (27 May 1988) the conservative leader of the Prachaakorn Thai Party, Samak Suntharawet, makes available two rooms in his Bangkok residence for his huge collection of amulets, images, and other sacra. These things, he said, provide the necessary protection and power needed to be a political leader in present times. The article also mentions that before Samak entered politics in 1976 he had only one Buddha image but as time went on he felt the need for additional support.

After Man's death his own amulets were produced and made their way into the tortuous and circuitous market-place, which the master would surely have frowned upon. In his old age Ajaan Waen blessed amulets brought to him by the laity (see also Tambiah [1984, pp. 260 ff.]) and saw this in terms of dispensation of goodwill or loving-kindness to his many visitors. According to a monastic informant who was with Waen at the time, he once said in dismay that “I nearly gave up my life many times in the pursuance of my practice and when people come to see me [instead of asking about how they can practise themselves] all they want is for me to bless a medallion!”<sup>35</sup>

Forest monks explained the amulet cult in that the laity seeks to possess



sacra in the way in which they approach religious practice, from different levels of understanding. For most people the ethereal subtleties of *dhamma* grasped through intuitive insight, reflexive cognizance gained in meditation have little real meaning without something tangible or palpable to grasp with the appearance of regulating everyday affairs. While most forest monks work towards eradicating the superstitious “grosser” aspects of belief and practice, the cult of amulets and relics seems to be a normative concession in this regard.

The precisian forest monk Thui Chanthakaro (Wat Paa Daan Wiwek, Norngkhaai — see Chapter Eight) said that after he first arrived at his present site he was asked continually by the nearby villagers at Baan Saeng Arun for popular religious services and artefacts. He said he wanted to change the people’s “habits” (*nisai*) and dependence on animistic beliefs and practices but could only do this gradually, step-by-step. As an example, at first he did use sacred water (*nammon*) for some rituals, until one day when villagers asked him for sacred water he replied they should get it themselves from a nearby bucket. Finally, he refused outright and the people did not approach him from that time onwards. Until recently, Thui had a stream of outside visitors come and try to obtain “lucky numbers” (*hai laek*) but now has a sign on the monastery gate which says “this is not the place for lottery numbers or for casual tourists”.

At Baan Saeng Arun the people gave up asking for popular religious services and artefacts from Thui, but it did not (as far as I could ascertain, except in very few cases) change their particular religious outlook and practices. At least the villagers in their pragmatism realized the limitations and threshold to which they could pursue their own social and cultural needs at the forest monastery. If Thui’s exemplary behaviour and doctrinal teachings did not allow for a flexible, emollient interpretation, the villagers could simply turn elsewhere. This was the case and, besides their own lay ritual specialists, the people turned to a nearby Mahaanikaai village monastery. In this way it soon became apparent to the villagers that there was a bimodal dimension to religious soteriology (see Appendix B for a brief discussion on these dual orientations).

Whilst I wish to underscore the divergence in functional proclivity between reclusive monks who tend to avoid involvement in dispensing ritual artefacts and the more charismatic “popular saints” who indulge in the cult, as mentioned above the modalities tend to fuse and become imperceptible at some point between the two orientations. The former typology are monks



who, as Tambiah (1984) notes, prefer to avoid the intrusions of the laity, “devalue” popular cults and merit-making rituals, and maintain the monastery in seclusion away from “social gathering”.

One charismatic forest monk known for his mind-reading and precognitive skills, and around whom are spun many colourful tales is the above-mentioned Ajaan Lii — perhaps the most famous disciple of Man to become involved in amulets and relics, especially those he brought over from India. In one tale a group of soldiers came to see Lii at Samut Prakaan province where he was staying and asked him for amulets to protect them fighting insurgents in the northeast. Lii gave them some amulets and told them to be careful. On their way to Khoraat they became drunk and decided to test the potency of Lii’s amulets (in fact highly respected by all forest monks with whom I spoke). They tied a bag containing the amulets around the horns of a buffalo and then machine-gunned the beast. The buffalo was unscathed and when the soldiers later went back to see Lii and explain what happened he simply laughed and said the buffalo had more sense than all the soldiers put together. Tales such as these after a while become apologues, used as a reflective discursive means of helping the recipient to see the consequences of their actions clearly, or to illustrate an aspect of normative exegesis.

Seemingly not everyone appreciated Lii’s charismatic individualistic style, particularly some of the more conservative Western-educated urban rationalists such as Ouay, former Prime Minister Kheukrit Pramroj, and others. Ouay mentions that he felt Lii had discredited himself in the eyes of many urban supporters by displaying his mystical powers. By this behaviour he attracted a large number of curiosity seekers including monks who were not so keen in developing their own practice as much as wanting to be around the teacher to see what he would do next. This created an almost circus-like atmosphere everywhere Lii went.

Lii (1987*b*) gave a reason for his interest in amulets a year before his death in 1961 (which he had predicted accurately some years earlier) in the following translation from a question-and-answer session in one of his recorded sermons:

Q: Than Ajaan is involved in many “social activities” [implying in this context involvement with amulets and interaction with lay followers] why don’t you emphasize to them [supporters] instead meditation, how to attain release from suffering?

A: [Lii] How do you suppose I should do that?

Q: Teach them the direct method of reaching *nibbana* and avoid other



various non-relevant lay activities.

- A: I'd like to teach people how to go direct to *nibbana* but it is difficult. I'd like to do that, but I don't [with most lay followers], because if I did that, I would go mad. After rice harvesting would you take only the unhusked rice from the field? Would you do that? Personally I'd take everything that is useful, not caring who said I was mad. I'd take not only the paddy rice, but dry stalks for feeding buffalo, or to sell or make fire, the rice husk for pigs ... everything that is useful for its particular purpose.

Tambiah (1984) has pointed out that there are two levels of discourse taking place between the forest monk and the laity. On one level, the charismatic moral purity of the forest monk in his detached other-worldly vocation and on another level, the worldly laity seeking to gratify sense desires, manipulate social conditions for personal ambition, power and prestige. Amulets, some with a high market value (and thus sharing the same characteristics as the circulation of other valued commodities in Thailand), become the symbolic embodiment of power and "reflect and legitimate ... the hierarchy of merit" (*ibid.*, p. 342).

So long as the relic or amulet continues to be considered as authentic (perhaps occasionally performing miracles), it maintains its value as a potential commodity and symbol of power. It is thus used to gain status and secure wealth through the mechanism of distribution. Seemingly, the marketing of relics, according to one informant, commenced from the top levels of society, from individuals with first access who had been able to gain close proximity to the teachers. Over time these appear in many places through the complex circularity and interspersed in speciality market-places.<sup>36</sup> Within this pattern, circulated religious artefacts work their way upward, increasing in value and at the same time gaining in mystical luminosity.

According to one reliable source, the minute partially crystallized bone fragments of Ajaan Fan Aajaro, who died in 1977 (cremated the following year), currently have a market value of around 150,000 to 200,000 baht (US\$5,769–US\$7,692). Similarly with amulet-medallions considered limited edition first batch, as in the case of Ajaan Juan Kulachettho. Originally, Juan was given a small number of amulets by an urban supporter which he subsequently gave out to villagers in token of their help in constructing his incredible mountain pathway (see endnote 6). In time the villagers were approached by outsiders wanting to buy them. Some were simply given away, other more astute villagers sold them for up to 1,000 baht



(US\$38) until eventually at the village of Baan Naa Khornkaen there were none left. These same amulets a few years later fetch one hundred times the highest price paid at Baan Naa Khornkaen in the urban market-place. Villagers were aware of this and thought they had been duped by outsiders.

Tambiah (1984, p. 336), attempting to mute the exaggerated contrast between Marx and Mauss, has mentioned the cultural dynamic process of “vulgar materialization” in which the *arahan* in his pure spiritual plane becomes firmly grounded in the process of assuagement and “gratification” for the laity. As a consequence of this “law of gravitation”, the artefact undergoes a contextual shift from its original intent as “donation and love” to “trade and profit”. In the case of Juan’s amulets, this logic can be clearly appreciated.

This transformative movement from one social context to another (that is, to a valued item destined for circulation and commoditization) does not seem to concern the forest monk. I was interested in finding out whether forest monks saw this in any way as an amoral or immoral transformation. As explained to me, in the fetish (in the literal sense) process of exchange, the “giver” has no control over the functional use to which the relic or amulet is put (whether for local prestige, political or personal power, thaumaturgic, and so on). To put this another way, the concentrated moral vigour manifest in the artefact is transformed by the receiver (at the coarser spiritual level) and used for worldly gain or to legitimate entrenched secular power. Indeed, every sanctified amulet manifests radiating energy (*te’cho*) which the Buddha himself possessed in immense measure (Griswold, in Tambiah [1984]). Some of the laity may consider this as a protective or manipulative force (as in *saksit* powers), whilst others

might argue that by reminding the wearer of the Doctrine [*dhamma*], and particularly that part of it that counsels constant alertness, it enables him [the amulet owner] to keep out of harm’s way. (Ibid., p. 204)

Although officially frowned upon, as in the *Thalaengkaan khanasong* (1952), even the strictest doctrinal interpretation on amulets allows for belief in their potential efficacy (O’Connor 1978, p. 231). Normatively, amulets,<sup>37</sup> which are in the same cultural category as sacred relics, function as reminders of the pure sanctity of the virtuoso (whether “town” or “forest”) and attributed with mystical powers. A visit to the principal urban market-places will show that the cult of amulets is not exclusive to forest monks, but that in recent times those charged or sacralized<sup>38</sup> by ascetic monks have been especially valued in the lay search for mystical powers. Even a medallion of



the great Wachirayaan is “worthless compared to one made [?] by an untitled forest monk with *aphinihan*” (O’Connor 1978, p. 35).

Tambiah (1984, p. 185) correctly mentions that the involvement of forest monks in the “cult” were not the “core orientations” but emerged in this way due to the “cumulative logic of popular religiosity” and thus the “main foci [at least substantially] of lay worship”. In the case of Man and his purist core of pupils, they were no “crude dispensers” of religious artefacts or concerned with popular rites and rituals. Yet their personal mystical experiences (as an adjunct to normative meditation as mentioned earlier) were ratified among themselves (*ibid.*, p. 136).

It was these marginal associations with *aphinihaan* which were eagerly picked up by the laity, in many case reworked and dissembled in the transformative and discursive process of being passed around. As mentioned in Chapter One, these mystical experiences and visions were interwoven effortlessly by those recounting the tales within the framework of normative tradition. Many tales of fantastic feats were mentioned to me by forest monks themselves about Man’s early pupils such as an event recounted to me from the 1930s when Ajaans Waen and Khao went wandering with Man in mountainous countryside. At one place they stayed in a cave near the top of a steep mountain; the two pupils went down the arduous track to collect water, and on their way up saw Man floating in the air sitting in meditation — an extraordinary yogic feat.

\* \* \* \* \*

In this chapter I have discussed some of the popular conceptions of north-eastern forest monks starting with the identification of the tradition as a distinctive monastic strand in the Greater Thai Sangha (I am concerned with a bimodal focus on how forest monks see themselves and how outsiders see them). I also discussed the amulet and *jedii* cults at the terminal phase of forest monasteries and the cumulative processes of change. Similar to Tambiah, I see the amulet cult as a function of normative beliefs and practices, circumstantial to forest monks but integral to popular religiosity. I have shown that in the perceived need for the spread of merit and the efficacious power of religious artefacts, there were certain charismatic forest monks supremely capable of fulfilling this concession to lay needs who became what I have typologically referred to as “popular saints” (corresponding to Tambiah’s “tantric” mode, see endnote 1 in Chapter Eight). These



monks started out as wandering recluses and later in life fell prey to the fervid demands of the laity. But along the same axis at the other pole, there were also many ascetic forest monks, as noted earlier, who lived and died in relative seclusion and virtual anonymity.

## NOTES

1. The “three knowledges” (Pali: *vijja*) of Buddhism pertain to those meditators who have mastered the *jhana* and go on to secure the following: (a) recollection of former existencies; (b) observation of the death and rebirth of beings, and (c) destruction of the “cankers” or “mental taints” (Pali: *asava*). See Horner, *The Middle Length Sayings* [*Majjhima-nikaya*] (1967, pp. 28 f., 44 f., 94 f., 228 f., 302 f.; 1970, p. 24), and so forth.
2. For urban monasticism, see, for instance, Bunnag (1973; 1970*a*, pp. 87–106; 1970*b*, pp. 48–55), Keyes (1975*a*), Klausner (1973), O’Connor (1978, 1980), Wyatt (1966*a*), and Tambiah (1976).
3. For popular or village Buddhism, see, for instance, Anuman (1961, pp. 65–98; 1986), de Young (1963), Ingersoll (in Pfanner and Ingersoll [1962, 1966, 1975]), Keyes (1973, 1975*c*), Klausner (1964, 1968, 1971, 1974), Moerman (1966), Mulder (1969), Piker (1968, pp. 384–99), Pruess (1976), Tambiah (1968, 1970), Terwiel (1975, 1984), Cohen (1983, 1984), and Wijeyewardene (1986).
4. See Bunnag (1973, pp. 42–50), Chatsumarn (1986, pp. 62–80), Wyatt (1966*b*), Palanee (1984), Tambiah (1973*a*; 1976, pp. 288–312; 1978, pp. 125–26), and Keyes (1975*b*, p. 188). By and large, traditional support and patronage to kin (*yaatphiinong*) has continued to be an important element in the mobility of northeasterners to the capital.
5. The Pali term *citta* from which derives *jī*, or *jī-jai*, has its meaning as “the heart (psychologically), i.e., the centre & focus of man’s emotional nature as well as that intellectual element which inheres in & accompanies its manifestations; i.e. thought. In this wise *citta* denotes both the agent & that which is enacted ... for in Indian Psychology *citta* is the seat & organ of thought” (Rhys Davids and Stede 1959, p. 266).
6. Wat Phuuthork (Jetiyaakhiiriiwihaan), Norngkhaai province (visited earlier by Tambiah [1984, pp. 274–83]). This monastery is built around a mountain with a precarious-looking path (*thaangkhuengkhae*) built on sheer rock face by villagers from nearby Baan Naa khornkhaen in 1973 (amazingly there were no serious accidents during construction). It was finished three years later, during



this time many in the village were engaged in work for the monastery, paid by outside support (30–100 baht per day).

7. Wat Paa Udom Somphorn, Phannaanikhom district, Sakon Nakhorn.
8. Wat Tham Aphaidamrongtham, Sorngdao district, Sakon Nakhorn.
9. Wat Tham Klongphen, Norngbualamphuu district, Udonnthaani.
10. Information on Khao Anaalayo was provided by informants at Wat Tham Klongphen and Dr Ouay Ketsing in *Anaalayowaat* (a collection of Khao's *dhamma* talks and appendices) (Khao Anaalayo 1984, pp. 177–89); also Khao's biography written by Mahaa Bua and distributed at his cremation (1984, pp. 163). Mahaa Bua's own (1986*b*) also contains some interesting comments.
11. *Phuu ruamsaang aakhaan phiphithaphan borikhaan Phra Aajaan Man Phuurithatta-thera* [People who participated in the construction of the museum for the personal requisites of Phra Aajaan Man], 1975.
12. Tambiah (1984, pp. 274–80) mentions this person under the *nom de plume* "Lai".
13. *Ten Suttas from the Digha Nikaya* (1984, p. 275).
14. O'Connor (1978) prefers the term "magical" to supernatural power, as in a "canonical and Thai sense" such powers are "not greater than the natural but a realisation of it". In fact, "such powers are not magical" in a normative understanding, even though the laity may use them in this way (*ibid.*, p. 134 n.). However, I feel that "magical" is a much-maligned word and does not express the doctrinal character of such practices. I prefer "supranormal", as above and beyond "normal" and yet still within the realm of natural possibilities.
15. See *Luang Puu Waen Sujinno: Chiiwit-thaama lae Phrakhrung Runraek-thungrunsudthai* [Luang Puu Waen: his life, his teachings, his amulets] (n.d.). This story is also recounted in Tambiah (1984, pp. 272–73).
16. The particular patched appearance of the outer robe (*sangkhaati*) is a result of being stitched together usually in seven or nine "sections". The *Winaimuk* (vol. 3) says the cutting depends on the type of garment being made, but no less than five sections. See Wells (1975, p. 106), who says the completed robe makes a total of fourteen pieces, consisting of five squares, five rectangular and twice the size of the former, the other four elongated strips to make up the border of the garment.

The patched robe was also the insignia of the practising Sufi mystic, the "uniform of the wandering dervish" and symbolic expression of higher knowledge (Shah Idries 1964, pp. 324 ff.)

17. Victor Turner (1973) remarks generally that going on pilgrimage by foot was considered more meritorious than using modern means of transportation. I see



this as equally valid in the case of wandering forest monks visiting various meditation sites in the northeast.

18. Personal communication, 1986.
19. The antecedents of the Theravada conception of sacred places and sanctuaries for pilgrimages can be found in the above-mentioned *Mahaparinibbana Sutta*, which in turn has its roots in a Hindu tradition of pilgrimage to sites associated with charismatic teachers (Pruess 1976*b*, p. 4).
20. Phra Ariyaseko, Wat Paa Daan Wiwek, So Phisai district, Norngkhaai (interview, 1988).
21. I am not so concerned here with the historical connection between orthodox forest monks and the enshrinement of sacra (with its symbolic legitimating implications) as in the case of Sumana's renown relic find in the fourteenth century.
22. This originally consisted of a ten-year period, see *Mahavagga* (I, 32, 1); but also same work (I, 53, 4) where it is said that a competent monk (*patibala*) may remain in *nissaya* for five years. Whilst there is no formal obligation in Thailand for a monk to remain with a teacher for this period, in the forest tradition there is in some cases pervasive informal stipulation that a pupil should stay with a teacher for at least the first five years. Carrithers (1983, p. 76) finds this also to be the case in Sri Lanka. Ajaan Chaa (1982, p. 73) makes this clear for his own pupils, as have many other forest teachers (Khantipalo 1979, p. 43). Griswold and Prasert (1972, p. 57) on the Sukhothai forest monks mention in a translation of the *Mulasasana* that this was also the practice at that time.

After this "apprenticeship" period of five years, one was considered "freed from dependence" and personal obligations (Pali: *nissayamutta*). As the teacher in the above *Mulasasana* said to his pupil, "from now on you have no need of supports". Wells (1975, p. 184) remarks that after this five-year period a monk earns the title *Majjhimabhumi* (though I am not aware of this being used among forest monks). The term *majjhima* (Thai: *matchim*) means "middle" and in fact many forest monks told me that it indicated those who attained not five, but rather ten rains. This is a crucial transitional liminal phase for forest monks and carries with it prestige in being a "senior monk". The term *bhumi* (*phuumii*) means in this context, the level of spiritual development.

Requesting "dependence" could be made with either one's teacher or *upatchaa* (with over ten *phansaa*). In the case of Man, his disciples could continue to be "dependent" on him even though they were discouraged from staying too close for any length of time. They could still be under his direction and report back from time to time after practising meditation in seclusion. The control over monastic pupils would appear to be less complex in the "settled"



phase (pupils are not so mobile and stay more or less permanently in the monastery), rather than the early wandering phase (see the discussion on the “four phases” in the next chapter).

23. From a structural analysis of Ajaan Juan and Phaang’s monasteries, Tambiah (1984, chap. 19) concludes that the “cosmological ambience” was a “widespread feature of the indigenous forest-monk tradition”. However, this begs the question why forest monks choose these particular sites (or in Tambiah’s words “have a penchant for soaring mountains, lush forest, and caves perched on commanding heights” p. 283) to establish monasteries.

As forest monks said, monastery sites were chosen for pragmatic as well as cultural reasons. For example, high elevated positions were reserved for senior monks, the abbot normally occupying the highest position (spatial concerns indicate respect); caves were sought after for coolness and seclusion — therefore mountains were valued as well as convenient access to nearby hamlets, yet places where the meditators were least likely to be disturbed.

24. See, for instance, Terwiel (1975) and Tambiah (1976, p. 209 n.).
25. Thus Irvine’s (1982, p. 237) comment that greater value is given to the development of “marketable” supernatural powers (a feature of the mainstream *sangha*) than to “detachment” meditation (*wipatsanaa*) is rather misleading and reflects the flimsy division between *samaathi* (absorption concentration) and *wipatsanaa* (wisdom discerning or “insight”). Although he later adds that both modes of practice can “lead to a similar result in the minds of meditators” (ibid., p. 238).
26. Tambiah’s (1984) study of forest monks and amulets focuses on three accredited “saints”; Ajaans Waen, Phaang, and Juan.
27. Personal communication, Bangkok, 1988. Dr Ouay, as I intend to show in Chapter Eight, was one of the central figures in promoting forest monks at the centre in the 1960s.
28. See also endnote 3, Chapter Nine. Geary (1986) mentions that in medieval Europe a Christian saint’s relics were likewise regarded as a source of supernatural power and that methods were taken to ascertain if the relics were indeed genuine.
29. *Lokthip* 97 (year 6; 1987): 62–103.
30. Singthorng’s monastery Wat Paa Kaew Chumphon (Sawaang Daendin, Sakon Nakhorn) continues to be run effectively — but perhaps less firmly — by his cousin, the previous deputy-abbot, Ajaan Oun Thitathammo. Little has been recorded of Singthorng’s teachings. The only translation available is a booklet *The Way to a Cool Heart*, published by the Buddhist Society of Western Australia in 1981 (Singthorng had a number of Western pupils staying with



him at various times). A collection of some of his sermons has recently been put together in a publication called *Siangtham* [The sound of *dhamma*] (1988).

Singthorng did not consider he had the necessary *baaramii* for teaching (*thamma-thesanaa*) in the way his own teacher Mahaa Bua had. His personal style was direct, good-humoured, almost Zen-like. He was considered to be Mahaa Bua's successor and greatly respected by the latter (Ouay Ketsing, interview, 1988).

As regards the ill-fated plane crash, rumours abounded about some of the victims' earlier predictions that they would die together (*Lokthip* 97 [1987]: 90). Monks told me that Suphat had dreamt beforehand that he may not return and had told a friend and forest teacher Ajaan Thui (Wat Paa Daan Wiwek, Norngkhaai). Although Suphat was convinced about his fate, he felt it was too late to change plans. Villagers told me that Juan had likewise forecast his imminent decease and told them he may not return and made administrative arrangements at his monastery (Wat Phuuthork, Norngkhaai) before he departed. Singthorng had foretold a female devotee at his monastery that he would die before the age of fifty-seven, only four months before he went on the fated plane (he was in fact fifty-six when he died). Another informant (a prominent academic, Ajaan Jim Thippawan) said Singthorng had a vision *nimit* about his impending death. In fact there were only two lay survivors from the plane crash and both walked away to catch a taxi into Bangkok. One of these persons was the Deputy Under-Secretary to the Ministry of Interior and then Governor of Sakon Nakhorn (he became known as the "iron-bone Governor").

31. Since writing this, Suriiphan has since been awarded a Khunying title (1990).
32. During the course of my extensive field-work I would often encounter bus tours organized by EGAT's Buddhist Association; the same core group tend to go year after year.
33. Among famous forest monks (besides Man and Sao, but in their lineage) whose remains crystallized confirming *arahantship* were Ajaans Waen, Bua Siripunno, Khao, Phrom, Juan, Singthorng, and Wan Uttamo, among others.
34. Geary (1986, p. 179) mentions with regards to the relics of medieval Latin European saints, that during periods of weak central government relics were valued "not simply for their thaumaturgic power" but also for their ability (symbolic value) to replace public authority, protect and secure the populace, and ensure general economic well-being.
35. For a description of Waen's many minted amulets, see *Anusorn-ngaansedet Phra Raatchadamnoen Songprakorp-phithiitadluuk nimit Phuukphatthasiimaa ubosot*



*lae songthethornglor-phraprathaan Wat Doi Mae Pang, Amphoe Phrao, Jangwat Chiangmai, 24–26 Kumphaphan 2522* [In commemoration of establishing sanctified area around the convocation hall (*bot*) and making a golden Buddha image at Wat Doi Mae Pang, 24–26 February 1979], 1979, pp. 11 ff.

36. In the case of the dispersion of the Buddha's relics, when transferred from one context to another in mission lands it was impossible to transfer simultaneously or reliably the function and meaning it had gained *in situ*. It thus had to undergo a cultural transformation so that it could gain status and meaning within its new context. In other words it had to "prove" itself, and miraculous permutation or supernatural feats of authenticity were the means by which this was done. Geary (1986, p. 188) mentions that in medieval Europe, after a while the "relic" loses its luminosity and efficacy and cycles of renewed authentication become necessary (through a repetition of transferral or discovery).
37. See Anuman (1968, pp. 268–95). Books are readily available at all bookstalls categorizing and authenticating various amulets; see, for instance, Phrom Suthatna Ayutthayaa (1969).
38. According to one monastic informant at Wat Bowornniwet, in the production of a special category of amulets, old palm-leaf manuscripts are burnt to enhance the sacralizing process.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### *Impulses of Change*

Just as a leopard lurks in the ... forest and seizes wild beasts ... so too, the *bhikkhu* who devotes himself to his meditation subject<sup>1</sup> in the forest ... should be understood to seize successfully the PATHS. Hence the ancients said [in *Milinda-panha*]: “For as the leopard by his lurking [in the forest] seizes beasts, so also will the Buddha’s son, with insight gifted, strenuous by his returning to the forest seize the highest fruit of all”. (*Visuddhimagga*, VIII, 157–58 [Buddhaghosa 1975, pp. 289–90])

To recapitulate on the recent historical backdrop, the first decades of the twentieth century saw immense change in which, during the post-war years, northeastern forest monks became fully institutionalized. The status of monks generally was affected by the Fifth Reign reforms, particularly the impact on education, and to some extent medicine — both traditionally the function of monk specialists. The monastic life also became more specialized, internally structured, and attuned to the aspirations and changing world-view of the increasingly Westernized Thai élite.

Meditation, traditionally the specialized vocation of the ascetic recluse monk, had somehow to be formally regulated and brought into line with scriptural emphasis and normative interpretation. Unless meditation was seen as hermeneutically relevant, to be logically conforming to scriptural interpretation, it was regarded by reformers as redundant. Orthopraxy had been much maligned since the downfall of Ayutthayaa to the beginning of the Jakrii period and monastic practices, particularly outside the capital, were loose and disorganized. Forest monks either started to disappear in the peripheral forests or became integrated into the *corpus* of the reforms. At the beginning of the scriptural movement this conflation seemed problematic but later, when the Thammayut started to become consolidated in the Lao



provinces in the backwash of Man and his senior pupils' popularity, it became a fruitful merger for the reformers.

Forest monks, as Yalman (1962) notes in Sri Lanka, disparage conventional religion which is seen to deviate from the "true" monastic vocation. In this country, institutional Buddhism of the establishment orders adopted over-indulgent features of monastic landlordism; pupillary inheritance of monastic property and any income deriving from this land (see Gombrich 1988, pp. 161–71), with political affiliations and corresponding caste biases (reflecting wider social patterns, see Gothoni 1986, p. 24).<sup>2</sup> The ascetic monks in Sri Lanka as self-proclaimed reformers were seen as a reaction against the established ecclesia, and as with all reform movements emphasize monastic discipline as moral purity. By rejecting institutional structures and statist ideology, reformers assert a return to what they consider the universal pristine way of the religion's founder.

In Sri Lanka, reformist forest monks see the very charisma and core orientations of the monastic life to be lost in the founding institutions and attempted to regain the "original source of the charisma" (Yalman 1962, p. 319). In so doing, these monks stood outside established ordination traditions and were outspoken in their criticism of the domesticated *sangha* (Carrithers 1979, p. 297). Carrithers includes the "thudong monks of contemporary Thailand"; though in fact "thudong" monks of the northeastern *Kammathan* lineage have not been outside established ordination lines (Pali: *parampara*) and have rarely been as outspoken as their Sinhalese counterparts. Indeed, historic conditions in both Theravadin countries necessitated different responses by the clergy to institutional developments affecting the *sangha* (see comments in Chapter One). Nevertheless, historical connections between the Siamese and Sinhalese *sangha* have been firm as early reformers in the Sukhothai and Laanna *sangha* were ordained according to Sinhalese tradition, thus segmentally linked in spirit and body.<sup>3</sup> But it is here, and in similarities in the informal relationship between teacher and pupil, small face-to-face organization, that any mutual associations cease.

The modern Sinhalese forest monks, manifesting in their presence a sense of this "pristine essence", caught the attention of Nur Yalman working in Sri Lanka in the mid-1950s. Yalman was intrigued to see them "walking through the jungle in single file, looking down on the ground [with mindful posture], bedraggled but impressive figures in their brown humble attire" (1962, p. 318). Carrithers (1979, p. 301) and Malalgoda (1976, p. 19) similarly concludes that forest monks typified the primitive quasi-domiciled monastic



ideals, “mirroring the image of a properly behaved monk”.

The “ultimate ideals”, in Malalgoda’s words, which forest monks exemplify are eloquently expressed and dramatized in the Siamese version of the Buddha’s life.<sup>4</sup> In Alabaster’s 1871 account (Alabaster 1971), the forest practice is the monastic norm leading to *nipphaan*. In this tale, Nalaka goes off as a *thudong* monk to the Himalayan forest to undertake the ascetic practices and meditation. By his perseverance in his practice he became the “first to attain the highest degree of sanctity” and entered *nipphaan* there and then (ibid., pp. 109–10).

Historically, the forest tradition has been transmitted (though not without ruptures) as a distinct monastic practice within the exported Pali lineages (*saai, saaitrakuun*).<sup>5</sup> The orientation of the tradition is based on a regimen of “psychological pragmatism” within the confines of supporting disciplinary code and simple daily routine. The performance of meditation is a personal concern, though monastic discipline among small bands of monks is both an individual and collective concern. As forest monks explain it, the two fundamental principia, meditation and monastic discipline, are basically inseparable. Monastic discipline leads to moral purity, or, as Carrithers’ says, the “basic emotional referent of the forest life”. When forest monks talk about “practice” this has wide connotation and encompasses the forest life *in toto*. A renown Sinhalese forest monk said in regard to the discipline, that as each rule governs a monk’s behaviour, it “has a purpose in mental cultivation” (Jinavamsa, in Carrithers [1983, p. 224]). Both meditation and monastic discipline are supplemented by the *dhutanga*, and together may constitute what forest monks call in general terms the “forest practice”. Normatively, its significance is aptly expressed in the following verse from the *Milinda-panha*:

Grounded on practice Sire, is the dispensation of the Teacher, in practice is its essence. It [the Buddha’s *dhamma*] will last so long as practice does not disappear. (Horner 1969, vol. I, p. 186)

Individual practice takes place in a pupillary relationship based on trust (in the teacher and the renunciant life) and confidence (that the normative teachings may become manifest within the meditator’s own experience), though in fact often the latter aspect leads practitioners to a condition of partial dependence on the teacher. The importance of this relatively short-lived dyadic relationship can be appreciated in that the core of the Buddha’s teachings was transmitted through pupillages, as enacted today among the forest monks (Swearer 1970, p. 57; Kornfield 1977).<sup>6</sup> The pupil places



himself under the guidance of a teacher who becomes something of a paternal figure and source of inspiration. The teacher is assumed to have higher attainments and travelled further along the "path" (*mak*) and thus locus of sanctity (*yut pen sarana*), giving occasional encouragement or reproachment as necessary to the pupil.

As already mentioned in the previous chapter, it is normally assumed that a monk should undertake a five-year "apprenticeship" under a teacher. Dutt (1977, p. 47) proposed that on this basis pupillages are fixed, the pupils taking on certain characteristics of the master (particular mode of monastic practice and the meditation regimen). The Pali Canon (*Anguttara-nikaya* and *Samyutta-nikaya*) mentions that the well-known forest-dwelling advocate of the *dhutanga* and disciple of the Buddha, Maha Kassapa, had his own sub-lineage known as *Dhutavada*, though Kern (1972, p. 75) refers to Maha Kassapa's followers as *Kassapiyas*. The point here is that pupillages are initially mobilized around the recognized charisma of certain individuals and consolidated by a period of residence close to the teacher.

At many of the forest monasteries visited in northeast Thailand there was minimal contact between teacher and pupil; the onus was on the pupil to find an opportune moment to seek advice on the practice or personal problems. Forest monasteries differ in this regard, some teachers are very inaccessible to the pupil, especially as they become more well-known, whilst others are always around the monastery or staying in the *saalaa* to receive interested visitors. After receiving counsel, the pupil will return to his single-room dwelling (*kuti*) in the forest encouraged to persevere in the practice.

Rather than simply "belief" (*satthaa*) in the authority of a teacher or his teaching, the emphasis is on verification of an external statement by the practitioner's direct recognition of its truth within his or her conscious awareness.<sup>7</sup> What in reality happens at that point depends on the individual, yet as many forest monks pointed out to me, to be able to endure the hardships and deprivations (especially the monotony and repetition) of living in the forest, trust and confidence in the teacher become important in the personalized relationship. In this dyadic relationship, as one monk-writer says, intuitive insight into the Buddha's "truths" (*ariyasatsü*) develops "heartwise from a teacher to pupil, through the former's instruction and the latter's application" (Khantipalo 1979, p. 69).

Thus, as we have seen, the centripetal element in the forest tradition is the meditation "teacher", that is, the "recognition" by pupils of authority in certain individuals over and above the principle of monastic gerontocracy



(as among the domesticated *sangha*). Meditation masters well-known for their sagacity, individuality, and normative accomplishments have attracted large followings (Ajaans Thet, Lii, Chaa, Fan, and Mahaa Bua, for instance). Then there are still others, respected no less, who preferred more seclusion and less administrative and pedagogic responsibilities (monks such as Ajaans Khao, Chorp, Waen, Tongrat, Kuu, and Phrom). As one forest monk told me, the simile from the *Nidana-vagga* in the *Samyutta-nikaya* is an appropriate comparison with the transient and mutable feature of monastic teachers. The Buddha in talking to his disciples at Savatthi said that when contemplating the laws of conditional being and gaining insight, it was as if

a man faring through the forest ... should see an ancient path ... traversed by men of former days. And he were to go along it ... [and] see an ancient city, an ancient prince's domain ... a goodly spot. And that man, brethren should bring word to the prince ... 'I have seen ... an ancient path ... a goodly spot. Lord, restore that city.' That city should thereafter become prosperous and flourishing ... Even so have I brethren, seen an ancient path, an ancient road traversed by the rightly enlightened ones of former times. (Rhys Davids 1952, p. 74)

The implication is clearly that in the passing of time and the decease of great teachers, the forest path becomes overgrown and entangled again until such time as another master appears to re-establish the norm, the *arahana* path.

The basic underlying structure at forest monasteries other than the dyadic relationship between teacher and pupil is the principle of seniority, both formal in the number of actual *phansaa* as a fully ordained monk, and informal in the duration spent with a particular teacher. These do not always relate, but formal seniority always overrides any other concerns. Indeed, it would appear that the *vinaya* itself, other than seniority, has no real means of establishing a hierarchy and organizational structure.

The principle of seniority can be seen clearly during the alms-round (lining up before entering the village) and regular morning communal eating. This is also noticed in Sri Lanka by Yalman (1962, p. 320), who wrote that the hierarchy was "manifested every day at mealtime" though in this case the food was passed along from the junior members to the senior, "and the junior would ceremonially 'worship' (salute) the senior". In Thailand, food is passed down from the most senior to the most junior who has the last pickings (though senior monks will ensure that all the junior monks have enough



food). Where two monks are of equal seniority then informal seniority rules, noted above, come into play. In the case of two teachers together, the one visiting the other will normally defer to the resident teacher except in the case of formal seniority rules.

Monks with at least ten *phansaa* (that is ten years as a fully ordained monk) are considered to have much “merit” and can easily establish their own monastery if they so wish. However, presently in the northeast there are few monks with more than ten *phansaa* and many monks under five *phansaa* running their own monasteries (for ritual implications, see Appendix D). Though the problem is not so acute among forest monks, this was noticed at some forest monasteries and in general is connected with the increasing shortage of long-term monks in the countryside, as noted by the Department of Religious Affairs. In the case of village monks, this was due to the intensified movement from the rural provinces to Bangkok.<sup>8</sup>

Among forest monks, I was told that in times past, younger renunciants would wander the countryside extensively and only later in their lives (with say twenty to thirty *phansaa*) settle down to head their own monastery. Ironically, in some of the northeastern forest monasteries today, the most senior monks are Westerners and, it is said, a cause of some concern to Thai religious bureaucrats. This attraction by Westerners to the ascetic forest tradition is a direct consequence of the intense interest in meditation since the late 1960s. While many Thai-ordained Western monks have come and gone, a few have remained and their formal seniority placing them in a position of considerable respect.<sup>9</sup>

Terwiel (1975, p. 104) mentions in his central Thai village study that, in the case of an abbot, “ranking principle often overrules seniority based on the number of ‘phansa’”. In the northeastern forest monastery where (with some exceptions noted in Chapter Five) teachers are also abbots and ecclesiastical-ranking monks are not present, this has not posed a problem. Nevertheless, in the modern *sangha* structure, as in the past, even a monk with the highest Pali and *dhamma* awards must still show deference to formal seniority.

Because of the continuing stress among small bands of forest monks on the centrality of the teacher, with his death follows something of a social crisis. At this point forest monasteries emerge as little more than relic-museums and routinized conventional monasteries. This latter phase I have termed “terminal” and corresponds with the “*jedii* cult” where the focus of merit-making shifts from more personalized interaction to collective,



rationalized organization. In fact this evolved phase is one of profound change, especially during the latter part of the teacher's life when he becomes too old to effectively teach or to regulate routine monastery affairs.

In the course of research, seventy-two forest monasteries were visited over two years in twelve northeastern provinces. Most of these were parent monasteries (established by Man's first pupils). My primary focus was on the lineage and sub-lineages rather than monasteries; the former led me to the latter and to where forest teachers eventually settled. From these seventy-two monasteries, fifty-eight received more than one visit, either by myself or for a short period by my two research assistants. A clear processual pattern emerged, which for the sake of clarity I have outlined (with corresponding locus of ritual merit-making) in four phases:

1. Peripatetic

Small agglomerated bands of quasi-domiciled wanderers; *ad-hoc* support from the laity such as in *phaa paa* (see endnote 10, Chapter Nine) offerings, transportation, and food; teacher's reputation growing at various impact points in the countryside filtering into the town.

2. Settlement

*Samnak* formed (although still seasonal *thudong* wanderings) on land donated by urban patron or local villagers; the teacher still active and controlling pupils; occasional urban visitors and start of organized *kathin* tours (Pali: *kathina*, annual robe-presentation ceremony in the month following the end of the rains retreat).

3. Climacteric

Teacher now nationally well known with unequivocal institutional support; *siimaa* established; many monastic inmates drawn to the monastery by teacher's popularity (including a high proportion of urban well-educated pupils); decline in ascetic practices and *winai*; merit-making peak with, as a consequence, many internal developments.

4. Terminal

Teacher now deceased; monastery no longer residence for practising meditators who have hived off elsewhere — but instead residence for *pariyat* (institutional) monks sent from the town under the direction of the former deputy-abbot (ex-officio charisma riding on the fame of the monastery and deceased teacher); some village monks and older *luang taa* forest monks; newly constructed *jedii* — the final supreme act of merit-making; forest inside and outside parent monastery now virtually cleared.

Though nearly half the survey sample could no longer be regarded as the



actual residence for ascetic monks (see definitive criteria below), these monasteries still maintained “mythic” associations with the deceased founder. Even many provincial Thammayut administrators tended to reinforce this increasingly tenuous connection with the original “pure” charisma.

The following indicators were used to assess internal transformation (towards monastic domestication) in the forest monastery. These indices include the spatial and temporal layout of the monastery, the monastic preference of its inmates, and the extent of interaction with the wider society:

1. The frequency of interaction among resident monks and novices; talking, reading, or audio visual entertainment (activities not found at forest monasteries).
2. The performance of daily routine chores (there are only a few community chores which are highly structured among small bands of ascetic monks and confined to specific times during the day).
3. The extent of participation in lay rituals (funeral rites, conferring ritual blessings, accepting outside invitations to meals, calendrical festivities — village-centred and so on are minimized among forest monks).
4. The significance given to fortnightly normative *sangha* rituals (*Sangkhakam*, especially the important *paatimok* [Pali: *patimokkha*] or recitation of the monks’ disciplinary rules which are largely neglected among village monks and even many urban monks).
5. The extent of construction and development activities in the monastery, such as a library, bell-tower, communal hall for *perian* and *naktham* studies, development of *Phutthaawaat* (the section comprising the shrine, *bot*, or *saalaa*) and corresponding replacement of individual monks’ *kuti* with multi-residence dwellings to accommodate more monks and especially novices (neither of these developments are acceptable to ascetic monks).
6. Monk/novice/lay practitioner (*phaa khao*)/female *mae chii* imbalance to the detriment of fewer fully ordained monks. At domesticated monasteries there will be a preponderance of novices from the local village/town attending *dhamma* and Pali studies, or *naak* (generally short-term ordinands), and an increase in female ordinands (usually tightly regulated at forest monasteries).
7. The number of monks with clerical ranks and titles (*perian* classifications), perhaps the abbot holding an ecclesiastical administrative position in the sub-district, district, or possibly province (rarely found at ascetic forest monasteries).
8. The accessibility of the monastery to the laity, which at forest monasteries is normally restricted especially during the *phansaa*; and restriction placed on the laity in entering the *sangkhaawaat* (the monks’ living area).



9. The extent of monastic activities (except fortnightly rituals) undertaken during the *phansaa* — which at forest monasteries is discouraged.
10. The perpetuation of traditional monastic forest crafts out of *phansaa* (making toothpick-brushes, cutting and dyeing of robes, and so on) — usually practised among forest monks.
11. Personal deportment, inside and outside the monastery, manner of conducting alms-round (mode of wearing the robes, carrying the bowl, walking according to seniority — aspects which often distinguish forest monks from their village and urban counterparts).

Among forest monks there is a passive awareness of changes taking place outside and inside the monastery walls, affecting the simple pristine life ways. The consensus among informants was that the *kammathaan* tradition was disappearing with both the teachers and forests, and that essentially this was simply the “nature of things” and thus unavoidable. Ouay (1978, p. 2) says that even in the 1970s forest teachers were harder to find than at the time of Man and Sao. This situation is related to the changing aspirations of new ordinands, as well as the breakdown in traditional life ways, the encroachment by the macro society into the once relatively bounded forest monastery with the increasing expansion of agricultural land and the exploitation of forest reserves (I shall return to this later on).

Interestingly, Man foresaw these changes some sixty years earlier. He predicted that the social and economic growth of the metropole and resultant effects in the countryside would have disastrous consequences for the ascetic forest monk. Man remarked that there would a boom in lay and monastic meditation initiated by enthusiasts in the capital (taking place in the 1950s and 1960s), the proliferation of self-proclaimed meditation experts (even from among his own followers) and fragmentation into religious urban movements (*yaek pen kok pen lao*). These, like the Thammakaa, Hupphaasawan, Ajaan Bunpen's group (see Tambiah 1985), and Santi Asok appeared in the early 1970s. Man, according to his biographers (Wiriyang 1980 and Mahaa Bua 1986a) also foresaw intense interest in “meditation masters” by the rich and powerful élite, connected with the atrophy of the *thudong* tradition and disappearing forests.

### RESISTANCE AND ACCOMMODATION

Social and political factors in recent times pressured forest monks into becoming more or less monastery-bound except for brief periods of dry-



season wandering. As mentioned in Chapter Four, bureaucratic restrictions on the movement and residence of monks embedded in the National Sangha Acts of 1902 and 1941 (since revamped in the 1962 Sangha Act) attempted to standardize the *sangha* to the detriment of the marginal wandering monks. Along with infrastructural developments spearheaded by the Accelerated Rural Development Department (*Rengrat Phathanaa Chonabot*) with American aid and World Bank loans over the past thirty years came the rapid depletion of the peripheral forests (the traditional *thudong* sites), the extraction of commercial timber followed by settlers seeking land for rice and cash-cropping. This was combined with improvement in communications and transportation, especially the extensive network of minor roads linking villages to provincial centres and in turn to the regional centre of Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa (with the Friendship Highway) and the capital (facilitating commercial development and transportation of cash crops for export [Uhlig 1984, p. 126, *passim*]). The Friendship Highway from Saraburii in the central provinces to Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa was completed in 1967, while the stretch from Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa to Norngkhaai was completed some two years earlier (Prayong and Bunthorn, in Joemsak [1991, p. 196]). This national conflation peaked in the late 1960s and brought the Thai nation-state into the heart of northeastern villages with rural development taking on a new impetus (but in fact hegemony and political and economic security were overriding concerns by the centre).

Thanks to the new network of minor roads throughout the northeast to the front gate of the forest monastery, urban merit-makers now had reasonably good access to renown ascetic monks they had only hitherto read about. The new improved infrastructure even made it easier for loggers to move in and out of the forest monks' habitat (including the nation's so-called "protected forests") removing valuable timbers in a streamlined operation involving the army and government agencies — not least the Royal Forestry Department (Angel 1988, pp. 254–55).

A number of elderly forest monks said that these days it is difficult to wander on foot (*doen thudong*) because everywhere there is cultivated land and by following the roadways there is no shade and the ever-present threat of careless drivers. Some twenty to thirty years ago in the well-treed countryside there was an extensive network of forest paths where one could trek for many days before meeting settlers or a logging camp. This, as I shall show, has now changed.

Today there would appear to be few forest monasteries which have



retained their primitive structure and monastic organization. Monasteries which have succeeded in keeping the modern world in abeyance have rejected such innovations as electrification, concrete paths, double-storey new buildings, piped water, and so on, in an attempt to maintain primitive and simple standards for the inmates. But in reality there are few forest teachers now able to control developments in the monastery, or to resist the impingement of a tenacious and fervent outside world. In a sense these remaining frontier forest monasteries are making a radical stand against the wider milieu though, as mentioned above, often succumbing in the process of elaboration (or “spoiling”) and eventual domestication. Forest monasteries affected by modernization and substantial oblations have not been able to retain practising monks who fled to smaller more discrete branch *samnak*. Well-known forest monks have been, in Tambiah’s words, “lionized” by the laity to such an extent that donations (*hai thaan*) created a quandary for the eremitic monks. This paradoxically complex devotional situation is aptly described by Gombrich:

The more a monk demonstrates his indifference to worldly comforts, the more he impresses the laity and comes to be regarded as worthy of their material support. Indifference to comforts thus causes them to be provided. (1988, p. 95)

As explained to me, within the symmetry of merit-making, the benefactor expects that donations offered will be accepted as monks are culturally obligated to personally accept donations unless it is in breach of *winai* (such as offering cooked foodstuffs in the afternoon). As people are generally aware of the rudiments of the monks’ discipline, a situation liable to cause an infringement is unlikely. In some cases I found that the laity in their determination to make merit and for social face, manage to circumvent forest monks’ temperance and stated disinterest in worldly comforts. However, I also heard of forest monks refusing to accept inappropriate gifts, and others tacitly accepting them out of a sense of ritual obligation but putting them aside to give away behind the donor’s back.

Ouay (1978, p. 13) remarks that wealthy patrons perceive forest monks as highly meritorious because of their discipline (and thus purity) and assumed mystical virtues. In the *Anguttara-nikaya* (IV, 127) the Buddha reputedly mentioned four traditional pitfalls and hazards to his pupils; namely, becoming bored with the teachings, over-eating, excessive material comfort, and lastly enticement by women. In this latter respect many in-



formants as well as textualized accounts (namely, Ajaans Fan, Lii, and Thet) mentioned “problems” and immense “courage” needed to resist covetous advances. In the laity’s view, abstention and self-control are two of the most admirable features of monasticism.

Ouay then mentions a fifth contemporary “danger” (*antaraai*) confronting the reclusive monk, namely, the proffering of substantial monetary donations by the country’s rich and powerful (ibid., p. 42). However, this is not new except in its scope as noted in early Siamese history, and is connected with the above normative “dangers” leading eventually to a general breakdown of the primitive monastic life, meditation, and discipline. This was foreseen by one of Man’s biographers and late first-generation pupils, Ajaan Wiriyang. As he explained to me, forest monks today have been spoilt by profuse patronage, especially and importantly by the royalty. The king since the 1960s regularly invited forest monks in the line of Ajaan Man to the Jitlaada Palace in Bangkok, which was then followed with formal invitation (*nimon*) by the nation’s élite. Wiriyang said frankly that everywhere the royalty had been there was a display (*sadaeng*) of improved infrastructure, such as public facilities, new *saalaa*, all-weather roads, electrification, and telephone lines (I shall return to a discussion of the effects of royal patronage below). Today, bemoaned Wiriyang, there is little of the primitive life ways to show and (in sharp contrast to his own present life-style) no place for those ascetic practitioners to avoid the “lionization” of the laity.<sup>10</sup>

One or two famous forest monks received luxury motor vehicles or had palatial-like hut built by rich supporters, as with the charismatic Sii Mahaawiirro (Wat Paa Kung, Roi Et) criticized by Mahaa Bua for building a sumptuous multi-million baht double-storey *saalaa*. But Mahaa Bua is considered (and indeed considers himself) the rightful patriarch of Man’s lineage (that is, in terms of lineage seniority), and thus feels that he can make such direct personal criticisms. Sii’s double-garage holds a mini-bus and Mercedes Benz, and his hut, set in the middle of a man-made lake, is complete with remote-control draw-bridge to keep out unwanted visitors (donated by a wealthy Sino-Thai businessman from Bangkok).

Similarly with Thet Thetsarangsii (Wat Hin Maak Peng, Norngkhaai), who resides in a grand multi-storey monk’s dwelling (*kuti*) overlooking his beloved Maekhong. Laa Khemmapatto (Wat Phuujorkor, Mukdaahaan) had at the time of writing spent over 60 million baht (US\$2.3 million), which includes the construction of new *kuti*, bathroom, toilets, and roads inside the extensive mountain monastery. When asked why he spent so much



money in monastery developments he apparently replied that it is simply an expedient means of utilizing huge donations.

Although these cases were exceptional up until fifteen years ago, this dilemma is now affecting many forest monasteries. It has also created distinct modalities and ruptures between those forest monks, on the one hand, who reject any accommodation to the laity and those who, either out of personal greed or passivity, let developments take place around them. The former, spearheaded by Mahaa Bua, continually criticize the latter (in fact the majority of monks presently claiming pupillary affiliation to Ajaan Man) for conceding to changes which diverge from the traditional forest norm espoused by the master.

O'Connor (1978, p. 148; 1980, p. 35) similarly notes that because of lay reverence for meditation monks, large donations simply created monasteries. In their respect for special monks, devotees wish to give liberally as an expression of devotion and faith. At Ajaan Chaa's monastery in Ubon, an informant told me that the monastery now receives an average of between 10,000 and 40,000 baht (US\$384 to US\$1,538) each day in donations. Weber (1968, p. 39) reminds us that it is factors such as these which largely determine the routinization of individuated charisma. It would appear that in an atmosphere of oblatinal fervour and the need for legitimation, the nation's rich and powerful are undermining the very foundation of the forest life ways.

With so much money circulating around the periphery, concentrated in the social field of the forest monasteries, it is little wonder that unsavoury tales of corruption and misappropriation of funds abound. Most of these tales relate to monks masquerading as pupils of a well-known meditation master seeking "supports" in the capital with rhetoric such as "Luang Puu (venerable elderly teacher) needs this or that". These monks prey on the eager generosity of an urban well-to-do laity. During a sermon in 1988, Mahaa Bua mentioned this problem to his disciples. In other cases I heard of monks who were able to get close to the ageing master on the administrative side of monastery affairs and then take off after building up substantial personal funds (tales like these were related around Ajaan Chorp, and the late Ajaans Khao and Lui).

The above problems confronting forest monks were not prevalent at the time of Man, as my informants were quick to point out. Yet the alms-dependent life ways have always been liable to excesses in the spirit of merit-making. So what makes the past two or three decades different? In recent



times the intensity of “giving” by the nation’s rich and powerful, including the widely expanded new Thai bourgeois capitalist class paralleling the development of domestic capital since the 1960s has been significant (see, for instance, Anderson (1977), Bell (1978, pp. 65–66), and Hewison (1985, p. 269). Simultaneously, the northeast has been exposed to the pulsations of global economics and regularized political processes dominated by the centre. In the new “semi-democratic” polity (Anek 1988), Bangkok and the provincial *nouveau riches* have worked with the Thai state in facilitating the growth of indigenous capital and obtaining a greater say in the national political process. Seemingly, economic growth and political changes, especially the 1973 revolt, “weakened the traditional bureaucratic élite and allowed the emergence of big business as an additional power” (Korff 1989, p. 48). But in many cases, to convert new wealth to legitimate status and power (and conceptions of morality) necessitated a search for traditional sources of indigenous charisma linked to the respectable notions of monarch, state, and religion. The charismatic northeastern forest monks were obvious targets in the objectification of ritual merit-making. As well, this invigorated social force also spawned urban religious movements mentioned earlier in this chapter, such as Santi Asok, Thammakaai, and Hupphaasawan in the early 1970s.

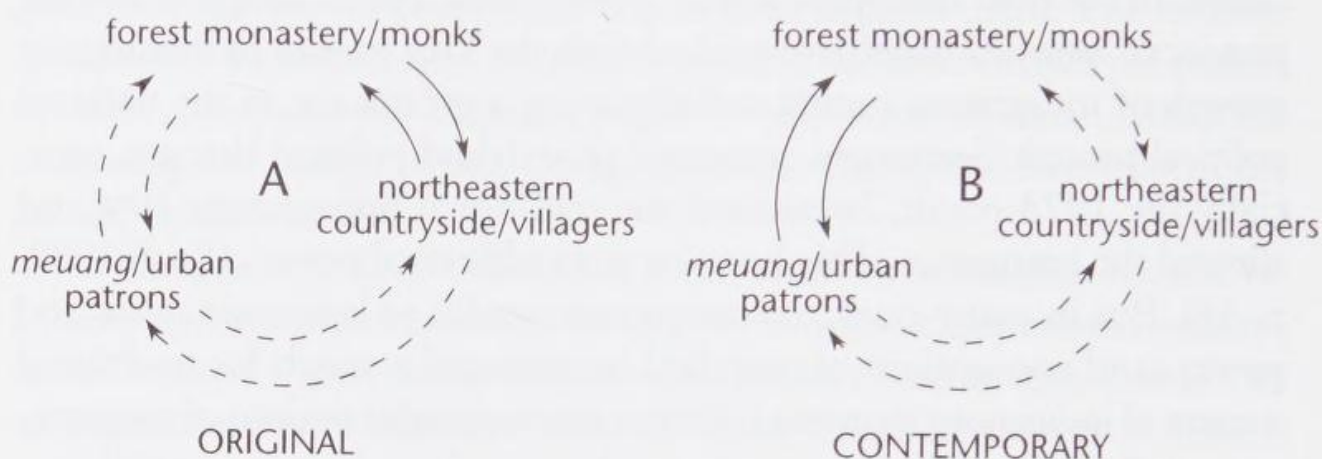
Since Sukhothai, the paradigmatic and exemplary model (with the king at the apex) has long been inherent in the mode of patronage and support offered to the *sangha* by the traditional élite (the nation’s politically powerful, and those aligned with the royalty). It was also an effective means of controlling the nation’s fringe-dwelling ascetics. Emulating this elative model (and thus showing continuity) could thus be seen as a means of legitimating one’s social position and newly acquired power bases (see also the discussion in Chapter Nine).

The forest tradition in Thailand, as we have seen, has long been associated with the élite. More recently also with an aspiring provincial middle-class, including educated local leaders, senior police, military, medical practitioners, dentists, some school teachers, and wealthy Sino-Thai traders. Some observers suggest that this intersects with support for the royalist Thammayut generally in the countryside (see, for instance, Kirsch [1967]). But in fact Thai élite who offer patronage to forest monks do not necessarily extend this support to the urban Thammayut monastery and I found that most will simultaneously patronize a well-known Mahaanikaai forest teacher.

Once forest monks became ensnared and socially bound by élite



patronage, villagers, perhaps from a sense of deference and humility (*krengjai*), avoid being too close to the teacher. Interaction with the forest teacher tended to become more formalized through the village leaders, or the more articulate and prosperous peasantry. The triadic relationship between the interacting social fields consisting of villagers, urban élite, and forest monks can be expressed in the following conceptualization:



As the relationship between forest monastery and urban élite becomes firmer, the interaction with the village undergoes a fundamental transformation and increased social distance. Most forest monks are now elevated largely beyond the reach of the village world, where they were originally nurtured and sustained by the peasantry (including their own kindred). Initially, wandering forest monks depended on villagers almost completely for basic supports, but in time, through the metropolitan connection, became imbibed in a condition of partial dependence on their new and powerful patrons. As a survey has shown (Appendix B), to satisfy its calendrical ritual needs the village looks beyond the forest monastery, to its own socialized *wat baan*.

Ironically, as we have seen, although much of present-day support given to forest monasteries derives from the urban educated sector, and many of the monastic pupils come from middle-class backgrounds, forest teachers themselves are from the village, with little or no formal education. Around the time of Man, pupils consisted by and large of village men and boys, but today, as one forest teacher told me, because of the imposition of new material values and urban influences, few are inclined to take up the precisian eremitic life. As another monk said, the village youth today do not have the same "temperament" (*jaikhor*) as their predecessors, and overall are less inclined towards the disciplined monastic life. In general, there are more opportunities for villagers than previously when pervasive informal networks in the *sangha* were the sole means (for the boys) to break away from the



confines of the village and, it was assumed, to an improved social position.

Today, forest monks in the northeast come from many parts of the country, attracted to the meditative life restored by Man and his early pupils. Most younger inmates were from the *meuang* and well educated, as Ajaan Chaa (1982, p. 59) says of his own pupils, many were now university-educated. Ajaan Thui confirmed this from among his own disciples and said that worldly education was not an advantage in terms of the meditative life and that these more articulate pupils were in fact harder to train (he likened them to “sitting on a balloon”, without a firm base). Thui went on to say that some twenty years ago forest monks were from the village and seemed to settle into *samaathi* (concentration meditation) with more ease than well-educated urban pupils (he did not elaborate, but perhaps because of fewer distractions, mental conditioning, and discriminating perceptual faculties). As noted in earlier chapters, Man had a number of former *pariyat* pupils and considered that textual study (*dhamma* and *vinaya*) made it harder for them to train their minds to achieve single-focused concentration. He said that these monks had to first place their “theory” back on the book shelf (*Phra Aajaan Man Phuurithatta-thera: Chiiwaprawat*, 1984, pp. 96–97).

Despite their rustic origins, those forest teachers I met were able to communicate efficaciously in a duplex mode to both social dimensions (semi-literate rural folk and educated urban folk), and in terms and concepts readily understood. This capability was seen as indicative of a “skilful” teacher. Man himself would apply this dual mode of discourse, as befitting circumstances. In teaching the villagers, for instance, Man would generally focus his sermons around three topics, “generosity” (*thaan*), “morality” (*siin*), and on the application of mindful-awareness in everyday life.<sup>11</sup> Once after a meditation vision in which Man perceived with clarity “heaven” (*sawan*) and “hell” (*narok*), some disciples suggested he teach this to as many people as possible, but the master replied that this was not feasible. Each individual may understand in his own way, in the given context, and personal experience (Mahaa Bua 1986a, pp. 174–75). Here Man seems to be affirming his preference for a more personalized, face-to-face teaching mode rather than simply indiscriminate proselytization, though not discounting broadcast teaching among his own disciples when invited by the ecclesia (see Chapter Five).

In a general sense, Man and his followers — though of the village — were engendered by historical processes and had more in common with reform urban monks’ interpretation of the *dhamma-vinaya* than the multifarious



rural *sangha*. As we saw in Chapter Five, many of Man's forest monks were dissatisfied by the debased non-normative behaviour of the local Mahaanikaai *sangha* which provided an impetus for seeking reordination.

Yet the forest monastery is an integral part of the northeastern countryside, and in many places the forest monks in their social field are the only immediate source of merit for isolated communities. The extent to which forest monks participate in Buddhist calendrical rites varies according to the temperament of the teacher, though at all forest monasteries I found this minimized.

At the other social polarity, when I asked forest monks what they thought the nation's rich and powerful gained from ritual interaction, responses were not always consistent. Though generally some commented that because these people have everything in a worldly sense, by itself this is not enough for them (*mai phor*); insatiability is seemingly boundless. Success in the world, materiality, and power on one level has to be counterpoised and controlled by "powerful *dhamma*" and pure virtue on another.

During Man's peripatetic phase, the master and his contemporaries had little need for money except for occasional assistance with travelling (if using the railways). These monks depended almost totally on the village for basic needs and on the surrounding forest for personal requisites (bamboo containers for drinking vessels and spittoons, medicines, rattan, dyes, detergents, and the like). Ajaan Chaa (1980) succinctly describes the life at that time as "very simple".

Malaria was rife in the first few decades of the twentieth century, with few commercial drugs available up-country. Thus most of the villagers and monks had to rely on herbs and roots found in the forest. A number of forest teachers (notably Ajaan Fan Aajaro) were well known for their knowledge of the curative properties of forest products. A monastic informant in Norngkhaai makes medicine from a plant *salet phangphorn* (*Clinacanthus nutans* Lindau) for treating sores and bites. At another forest monastery in Chaiyaphuum province a monk makes a medicine called *faathalaaijon* and *baibuabok*. At still another forest monastery in Udonthanaai, I observed monks drying leaves called *bai naat* used in hot bathing water for elderly monks (also still used for post-natal women, referred to as *yuu fai*, "sitting by the fire"). Forest monks (as in Sri Lanka, see Carrithers [1983, p. 76] on Pannananda) also depended significantly on the time-proven cure-all fermented urine (one of the primitive *nissaya* rules). As one monk said, when one's life depended on it (indeed many tales were told of various illnesses



being cured in this way), there was little choice.

In this early period, alms-round was uncertain and may have been up to 6 or 7 kilometres or more. There was no additional food brought to forest monks, as is the custom today at settled forest monasteries. The diet consisted predominantly of glutinous rice (*khaaw-niaaw*), with salt and chillies. The teacher and his disciples, reflects Chaa,

practised in the forest with patience and endurance alongside the many dangers that lurked in the surroundings ... many hardships to body and mind. (1980, p. 73)

The *winai* injunction restricting the handling of money<sup>12</sup> is taken seriously among most forest monks with whom I met. Monetary donations are usually given to the teacher either in the form of ordinary bank cheques (in the name of the monk, or less frequently in the name of the monastery), cash in an envelope, or special bank “gift” vouchers. This disciplinary injunction is rather ambiguous in a modern context, as in a recent controversy which arose over whether forest monks going overseas should carry travellers cheques.

All monetary gifts are handed over to a lay nominee responsible for collecting money (*khonruab-ruamngoan*). The teacher controls the use of this money and would nominate someone from the local village committee or perhaps trusted kin to do the banking (*waijaawatjakorn*). During the time of the late Ajaans Khao, Waen, and a few of their contemporaries who did not run the monastery but simply resided there, these matters were out of their control (which I am told was part of their intention).

Mahaa Bua, who probably receives more donations than any other forest monk in the northeast today (with the possible exception of Ajaan Thet) has two bank accounts. One is used for channelling money to outside charities, the other for day-to-day monastery expenses. Mahaa Bua, unlike many forest teachers, has been able to regulate monastic affairs without spoiling the monastery by circulating money in the macro society, and selective dispersion (mentioned below). He does not keep large amounts of money and continually instructs his monks to give away anything considered excessive which may be offered. In earlier simpler times, Mahaa Bua used to ask his elderly mother, then a *mae chii* at the monastery, to do the banking. More recently he relies on two distantly related kin from his nearby village of birth, Baan Taat, to undertake the banking chores. As a general rule larger domesticated monasteries will have a permanent “*wat* committee”



(*kammakaanwat*) to handle the day-to-day running of the monastery, but in the forest tradition the meditation teacher is the focus around whom all ritual and day-to-day activities take place. Thus as we have seen above, on the death of the teacher and the construction of his *jedii*, the monastery ceases to become significant as the locus of individuated charisma.

Many forest teachers in the northeast do not permit their pupils to receive personal donations of money and instead provide “supports” (*upatham*). Thus, should the pupil need to purchase something, usually transportation fares, they will ask the teacher. Basic items such as candles, mosquito net, mats, and so on are provided at the forest monastery.

Nearly all monastic informants, especially forest teachers, were reluctant to talk about money but, as mentioned at the beginning of Chapter Six, it appears that a great deal finds its way back into the local community (schools, hospitals, and orphanages are the most common recipients). Mahaa Bua set up a foundation for crippled children and has a particular interest in health care.

It should be borne in mind that with traditional urban and village modes of religious life, monks receive additional income by holding lay ceremonies inside and outside the monastery. During times of special needs, such as repair work, monks actively solicit donations. Forest monks on the other hand have minimal interaction with the laity, with the exception of perhaps *Thort Kathin* (see Chapter Nine), and remain totally dependent (without soliciting funds) on the generosity of local and distant supporters. Many times when I stayed at forest monasteries consumable items had run out, such as the much-needed huge amounts of sugar for the afternoon collective hot drink. I asked why no one had mentioned this to the many wealthy patrons coming and going and the reply was that the teacher had forbade them. A frequent pedagogical response was that one should learn to be satisfied with conditions as they are, and an opportunity to take mental note of one's desires, likes, and dislikes.

#### ROYAL FERVOUR AND NORTHEASTERN FOREST MONKS

Perhaps the most radical changes to the primitive life ways were brought about by the incursion into northeastern forests by an enthusiastic royalty during the 1960s. I have already briefly discussed this above, but will now assess this impact in more detail. The attendance of the king in the widely broadcast bathing rites (*rotnamsop*) and cremation (*kaanphaosop*) for Ajaans



Fan, Khao, and Waen is noteworthy. This was the culmination of visits to northeastern forest teachers which included also Ajaans Wan, Thet, Sii, and Chaa.

One of the last first-generation pupils of Man visited by the king seems to have been the late Ajaan Wan Uttamo, Wat Aphaidamrongtham, Sorngdao district, Sakon Nakhorn (a tour which included the last monastic residence of Man, Wat Paa Phuurithatta-thera at Baan Norng Phuer, discussed in Chapter Four) in 1979, a year before his death. Wan, who visited the Jitladaa and Chiang Mai royal palaces at least once through royal invitation, had the honorary prestigious Jao Khun Phiset rank conferred direct by the king. In the monastery, the king supported the construction of a new *saalaa* in the late 1970s (the visitor will notice a now-fading photograph of Wan with the king taken during his last visit to the monastery).

Every year in November when the royal first couple are in residence at their Phuuphaan palace, they would sometimes visit famous *jedii*, or one or two first- and second-generation forest teachers. But besides the northeastern countryside, social interaction also took place in the capital. Within the grounds of Jitladaa Palace one forest monk told me that nearby the king's experimental rice plots the monarch has a special monastic dwelling for his forest monks, cosmologically sited in the heart or meta-centre of the Thai nation-state. Man's pupil Ajaan Rian Waralaapho (Wat Aranyabanphot, Norngkhaai) is a frequent guest of the king, and has spent much of his time in the palace. As mentioned above, in the last ten years the king's up-country visits have become fewer now that many of the more famous first-generation pupils of Man have died.

A number of informants mentioned that the queen was the first to actively support forest monks, and subsequently encouraged the king (see the discussion on the influence of Ajaan Lii in the next chapter). During the intense political period of the 1970s, the royal couple would frequently visit ageing forest teachers and beseech the ailing saints to live as long as possible. On these occasions the monks would be presented with *haakhan* ("bowl", *khan*, which etymologically pertains to the Pali *khanda*, the five [*haa*] aggregates of conditioned being) with five coloured flowers. When Khao was presented with this ritual offering he replied that the "five *khan*" are heavy and full of "pain" (*thuk*) implying that to live longer would only increase his suffering. After the king, the queen enacted the same ritual, followed by a king's privy counsellor. A phone was also installed in the monastery at the request of the king and a team of specialist medical practitioners assigned to



stand by day and night. One of the king's physicians was the earlier-mentioned Dr Ouay Ketsing (see especially the next chapter), who told me that he had to go back and forth to Udorn a number of times. Ouay and the other coterie of prominent individuals around Khao felt pity for the ailing monk and believed that he was keeping himself alive at the bequest of the king. Khao died in 1983.

Mahaa Bua was initially responsible for the funeral arrangements for Khao and like other forest monks had been displeased by the publicity and munificence of the ceremony, which was sponsored by the king. Many forest monks stayed away during the ceremony (attended by hundreds of non-forest monks wanting to be close to the luminous monarch and high-ranking provincial and Bangkok clerics), a "terminal" phase in which the *arahan* becomes routinized sacra of the state. Although Khao had sought a simple funeral, the king wanted a cremation ceremony reserved for the royalty and the country's highest-ranking monks. According to one monk who was involved in the arrangements, the palace spent around 400,000 baht (US\$15,384) on food alone for the many visiting monks (most of whom were not forest monks, and certainly very few who had been under the pupillage of Khao — these monks stayed away during the cremation). Khao first became seriously ill in 1967 and was being cared for by fellow forest monks, such as the popular Ajaans Juan, Wan, Singthong, Phian, and Thui. In the latter years of his life, he had to be moved around the monastery on a home-made cart. In 1977 he became paralysed on his left side, though he still continued to give brief sermons in the northeastern dialect until his death.

Ajaan Fan, according to Ouay, was the first forest teacher to receive a visit from the royal couple. Ouay was in fact responsible for looking after Fan and during the time when the monk collapsed Ouay had to use physical force to attempt to revive him, much to the discountenance of monastic observers due to the attitudes of social space and the sanctity of special persons (monks and royalty).

Essentially, there would seem to be a dissonance and contradiction between the desire on the one hand to keep forest *arahan* alive as long as possible and concern by forest monks themselves to let the ailing body "go its own way". The one sees the worthlessness of attachment to "form" (the pure level), and the other its puissant symbolic value in materiality (grosser conception). One of Fan's pupils mentioned to me that the ailing teacher wanted to spend the remaining years of his life at his mountain retreat which



he had constructed nearby some years earlier. But as the queen became concerned about his health, she asked that he be brought down to his parent monastery on the outskirts of Phannaanikhom district town nearby to public facilities. The queen then sent her own physician from time to time to care for the monk. As relayed to me, this well-intentioned “interference” (*saeksaeng*) was clearly against the wishes of Fan and his close pupils at the time.

In the last few years of Luang Puu Waen Sujinno’s life, according to his long-time companion, Ajaan Nuu Sujitto, the aged monk asked not to be taken away from the forest monastery. However, when he became seriously ill physicians under royal direction took him to Chiang Mai for medical attention. From that time onwards his condition became of national interest and headline news. Despite the king’s supplication, Waen made it clear that when the time to die came, he would just let nature take its course. Waen was cremated on 17 January 1986 after a lengthy debate over the auspicious timing for the televised ceremony which attracted an estimated half a million people. The late Ajaan Duun (Wat Buuraphaa, Surin) was similarly asked by the king to prolong his life until a hundred years of age and “offer” *dhamma* for the benefit and security of the nation. He responded that it depended on conditions over which he had no control. He died in 1983 at the age of ninety-six.

Other ailing forest monk pupils of Man still alive but closely monitored by the royalty include Ajaans Chaa, Buaphaa (Wat Phrasathit, Norngkhaai), and Thet. In the last years of his life, Ajaan Lui spent most of his time in the capital with one of the king’s limousines for his personal use and a leading physician standing by. The royal couple also sent food offerings once a week to Lui at his Bangkok *samnak* (the residence of a wealthy military official; see the next chapter).

Underscoring the historical nexus: since Sukhothai the intense interest in charismatic forest monks was related to the parallelism between the vitality of these monks and the king. The latter as *Thammaraachaa*, “the righteous ruler”, provided the right conditions for the *sangha* to thrive within the conglomerating kingdom. The condition in the temporal dimension rested on the condition of the *sangha*, its institutionalized charisma. Similarly, the “health” of the *sangha* was contingent on the infallibility and condition of the nation. Even Man recognized this social fact and reputedly told one of his former disciples that as long as Thailand had its palladia, the Emerald Buddha image with its king, the nation would grow in righteousness, secure



from any external threat. Thai-Lao monks in the ascetic revivalism inspired by Man considered this conservative dual modality, the nation (the king) and religion (the *arahan*) essential — whatever reservations the state may have held towards the peripheral-dwelling wanderers.

In the backwash of the king's intense interest in the well-being of national *arahan* with its circumscriptive and embracing effects, followed public and private institutions and the nation's rich. These were catalytic factors which brought expeditious change to the immured forest life ways in selected monasteries, and in turn other less important monastic centres in the Man lineage.

### TRADITION, CHANGING PRACTICES, AND COMPROMISE

It is in relation to these changes that I now turn to a discussion of the forest monk habitat in the northeast. The northeastern forests in fact are disappearing at an alarming rate, together with the remaining eremitic monks. As one forest teacher explained to me, forest monks need the space and wilderness as a retreat, to achieve "spiritual progress" (*khwaamkaonaa-korng jit*), and without the secluded monastic cloisters the forest tradition cannot survive.

The particular rules and training in the forest tradition are intrinsically part of the all-encompassing meditation regimen (*phaawanaa*) and with their deterioration fissures soon appear among the small face-to-face communities. In recent years, noticeable changes may also be found in some traditional monastic crafts, now less common; such as making meditation umbrellas (*klot*) with bamboo, or bowl stands (*thii rong baat*) from rattan — now hard to find in the forest. These and other forest monk requisites can be readily bought today from speciality shops in the nearest town for the "ready made" *thudong* monk. The toothpick-brushes<sup>13</sup> made from an astringent *kothaa* wood are commonly used by older forest monks and those in more isolated settlements. Natural dyes from the heartwood of the jackfruit tree (*kaen khanun*; Lao: *kanmii*) for robes are still used whenever possible, but as the jackfruit tree is harder to find, chemical dyes are becoming more frequently used. One forest monastery visited even planted its own jackfruit trees for the sole purpose of maintaining this distinctive badge of the eremitic life.

In the days of Man, the woodchips from the heartwood of the jackfruit tree were boiled until the liquid became a solidified lump of concentrated resin (see, for instance, Lii [n.d. (a), p. 21]). These small lumps could then be carried around in one's *yaam* (shoulder bag) and used when the time came for washing robes (robes are communally washed and, because natural dyes



are not permanent, simultaneously re-dyed when a consensus is reached by the small group of monks that they are “smelly”). However, since Man’s time firewood has become scarce so that the mixture (which includes detergent leaves [*bai miat*]) is not kept boiling for that long.

In the forest tradition plain white cloth is offered to monks (rarely complete robes, though this in some instances is also changing) which is cut into the stipulated pieces (see endnote 16 in Chapter Six), stitched, then dyed to give the dull burnt mustard appearance. The offering of plain white cloth to monks was revived by Mongkut and the Thammayut-tika (Wells 1975, pp. 108–9), the material had to be cut, sewed, and dyed by the monks in one day during the period of *kathin* (see Chapter Nine). For the inner-garment (*sabong*; Pali: *antaravasaka*), the dye from a “red stone” (*hin daeng*) is still used widely. In Sri Lanka the colour of the outer robe was more of a rich brown, symbolic of the distinctive character of forest dwelling in that country (Carrithers 1983, p. 178; Yalman 1962, pp. 318, 322). In Thailand, this colour has been emblematic of monks in a sense reformist but on the borderline of social acceptability, often without sanctions or proper ordination, such as the controversial Phra Phothirak’s recent Santi Asok movement.<sup>14</sup> Carrithers (1983) mentions the case of a small band of reformist monks in the 1930s attempting to redefine their monastic orientations; they then

experimented with using their own bowls for begging, and cutting their own robes from cloth offered by laymen. Nanananda [the leader] then tried various natural dyes to colour his robes the rich brown which signifies a forest-dwelling monk. When he finally succeeded, it was a substantial step towards redefining himself as a forest-dweller, a member of a small élite. (Ibid., p. 178)

Eliot (1971, p. 241) remarks that the original *sangha*’s prescribed “three robe” were dyed the colour of “kasava” which was “probably a dull orange selected as being unornamental”. The importance of a distinctive sartorial insignia needs underlining, and in general was deemed essential for reformers setting themselves apart from the mainstream *sangha*. But today because of its inverted status values (like patched and torn jeans among today’s Western youth, giving the wearer a sense of “membership”), many urban monks are emulating their forest brethren. Yet ironically the appearance of the ascetic wanderer in the early twentieth century was considered shameful and the cause of opprobrium by the establishment *sangha*. Presently, as one forest



monk told me, even some Mahaanikaai Bangkok monks wear the dyed double outer-robcs in the colour and style of forest monks. This is simply a parody of the primeval “rag-robe wearers” (*bangsukunjiwon*), a glorification of the *dhutanga* (see Appendix C) institutionally respectable since the time of Man.

Generally, forest monks wear both the *jiwon* (Pali: *civara*) and *sangkhaati* (Pali: *sanghati*), the latter unfolded as a second double-thickness outer robe, on alms-round. Whilst as mentioned above, it may be found that some urban monks are also wearing their robes in this mode, they usually have more than the prescribed “three robes” (a *dhutanga* rule), the *jiwon*. They also rarely use the *sangkhaati* unfolded (used during the *Sangkhakam* ceremony, draped over the left shoulder). In fact as many forest monks complained, the double-robe makes alms-round uncomfortable in the hot season, and with the exception of some sub-lineages this practice is dying out.

In the forest tradition this above-mentioned practice is connected with the primitive charter when, as a *dhutanga*, the Buddha’s disciples were permitted only three robes (the lower, inner, and outer robes or occasionally taken as the inner and double-thickness *sangkhaati*). According to monastic injunctions, monks are supposed to wear all three robes before they enter the village (properly dressed) on alms-round (taken as the *jiwon* and double-thickness *sangkhaati*). Monks told me that according to another rule with similar implications which forest dwellers have long taken as routine practice, if they leave their huts before dawn (early morning alms-round; but not leave the forest until they can see the lines on the open palm), they must have all three robes with them.<sup>15</sup>

In assessing changes taking place in the northeastern forest monasteries since the time of Man, I now focus on the perhaps most important personage in the modern forest tradition, Ajaan Mahaa Bua. Tambiah (1984, pp. 144–50) relates details on the day-to-day practices at Mahaa Bua’s monastery, Wat Paa Baan Taat, relying presumably on his own observations, informants, and a now out-of-date publication written by a former Western monk, Sunno Bhikkhu (1978). The most senior resident monk under the teacher is an Englishman, Phra Panyaawattho. Perhaps reflecting forest monks’ concern over detail, after reading Tambiah’s *Buddhist Saints . . .*, Panyaawattho seemed particularly keen to point out an error in a description of the monastic routine. This related to Tambiah’s comment (*ibid.*, p. 147) that these monks consumed milk in the evening — a disciplinary injunction monks in the Man’s lineage rarely break. However, they are permitted to consume certain forms



of milk derivatives, ostensibly for medicinal purposes.

Whilst the discipline at Wat Paa Baan Taat is still relatively punctilious, because of Mahaa Bua's ill-health he spends less time instructing individuals and controlling the day-to-day affairs of the monastery. These days he is often in the capital for medical attention or rest staying in a private *samnak* established for him in Saalaayaa district, Nakhorn Pathom, not far from the capital. When Mahaa Bua is in residence at Wat Paa Baan Taat, the morning meal time is a substantial function, packed with visitors from far and wide. The food offered to monks, though the one meal of the day, is varied and sumptuous. In the Thai conception, giving the best is a normal expression of devotion and respect, though creating the classic dilemma and paradox for the *sangha*. But despite this attention there is no doubt that Mahaa Bua still has a semblance of control, maintaining the monastery as close to its pristine form as possible. He also occasionally checks up on some of his monastic pupils who are now teaching themselves in Udonthani, Sakon Nakhorn, Nongkhai, and Nakhorn Phanom provinces.

During a sermon given during one of my many visits to the monastery, Mahaa Bua said that as he was getting older and his health was not so good, he was concerned about the hundreds of followers coming to see him every day. He said that he wanted to "give more" in the sense of making his teachings more widely accessible. He also said he was not sure of the future and did not feel that his teacher's "forest tradition" could survive after his demise. Some of his closest monastic and lay disciples confirm Mahaa Bua's concern to reach as wide an audience as possible, a somewhat mollifying posture unlike his selectivity some ten years ago. Some respondents felt that this was a reflection of a present-day social crisis, a need for spirituality in a moribund, materialistic world. One person who mentioned this was Dr Amaraa Amilaa,<sup>16</sup> a prominent physician, writer, and former resident at Wat Paa Baan Taat (looking after Mahaa Bua's mother until her death). In fact Amaraa now teaches meditation to the laity, seemingly frowned upon by Mahaa Bua and his senior monastic disciples; this may also be confounded by the fact that Amaraa is also a woman (the delineation and segmentation between sexes is very pronounced in forest monasteries) and has written *dhamma* books (based on the teachings of forest monks) for the laity. In the forest tradition, *dhamma* teaching is the prerogative of the monastic teacher and even close pupils will rarely teach. Indeed, the soteriology of "forest *dhamma*" leaves little room for a prominent lay role as religious leader. The latter extreme may be found in "Protestant Buddhism" (Obeyeskere 1970; Gombrich 1988), noted



in Sri Lanka since the nineteenth century.

There is no question that the many changes that have taken place in the countryside have had a profound effect on village life. Education (though in essence changed little since Fifth Reign reforms), health, local administration, electrification (and as a consequence, television), improved roads and transport, cash-cropping, seasonal out-migration are factors which brought the centre into the village and the village out of its rustic confines. Since the opening of the northeastern Friendship Highway in the 1960s, northeastern district and provincial towns now have express buses which every day connect with the metropolis. These developments have taken place at the front gate of the forest monasteries, situated at the purlieu of the village and are viewed with some ambivalence by forest monks, undermining the cloistered life ways and necessitating some compromise to the forest practice.

An early indicator of change impacting on Man's lineage occurred immediately after the demise of the master and his subsequent cremation on the outskirts of Sakon Nakhorn town. As soon as the ceremony was completed, Man's pupils dispersed in different directions, some with the master's relics (mentioned in the previous chapter). The only monks remaining at the forest monastery (today situated inside the town) were the Luang Taa "monks who ordained late in life".<sup>17</sup> The disciples of Man agreed during his cremation to meet around the same time each year at the monastery in token of respect to their dead teacher. However, because *pariyat* teaching and administrative monks were sent to reside at the monastery, Man's pupils never returned after the initial meeting. Over Man's cremation site a magnificent new *bot* (consecrated assembly hall) was erected, a landmark for the Thammayut in Sakon Nakhorn.

Mahaa Bua bemoaned some of the developments which took place at parent monasteries of Man's early pupils and encouraged his own pupils to "develop the heart" instead of the monastery and keep the forest monks' charter, its primitive, and simplistic life ways. But not all Man's disciples heeded this advice, as can be seen at many parent forest monasteries throughout the northeast. In one example, Bunmaa Thitapemo, who died in 1980 (Wat Paa Sirisaalawan, Norngbualamphuu district, Udornthaanii), was caught up in the enthusiasm to "develop" as early as the mid-1960s. The few trees remaining hardly screen the many buildings inside the monastery, or the "Disneylandish" concrete replicas of bears, elephants, and tigers (symbolic perhaps of undomesticated charisma) built around the elaborate *bot*. Bunmaa's cremation biography (which came out a year after his death) prominently lists



the monastery's main construction achievements, which are worth noting here:

- 1965 Front entrance, 80,000 baht (US\$3,076)
- 1966 Bell tower (not usually found at forest monasteries), 80,000 baht (US\$3,076)
- 1972 *Bot* (rarely seen at forest monasteries), 4,500,000 baht (US\$173,076)
- 1972 Monks' dwellings for important visitors, 350,000 baht (US\$13,461)
- 1980 Hall for formal Pali studies (*Saalaakaanperian*), again unlikely to be found at forest monasteries, 3,050,000 baht (US\$117,307)

Similar developments took place at other forest monasteries during the latter "climacteric" phase, especially those with easy access to the provincial *meuang*. In a survey (see Appendix A) of seventy-two forest monasteries it will be remembered that nearly half of these monasteries (still with a reputation of being "forest monasteries" because of their associations with Man and/or Sao) were either in the process of changing or had completely become *wat baan*, "village monasteries", or *wat nai meuang* (monastery inside the town and place for *pariyat* studies). Later in their lives, forest teachers in this category became lauded with formal ecclesiastical rank and administrative title.

Though there are widespread changes taking place in the northeastern forests, the ascetic tradition survives in a few remaining pockets of the countryside. Most parent monasteries associated with Man's first-generation pupils have been "spoilt" over the past twenty years, yet there are smaller isolated *samnak* where the traditional life ways are still enacted. That the tradition has somehow endured the torrent of fervid patronage and the disjunctive processes of rapid rural development has been due to a *quid pro quo* stand-off with the macro society. Influential supporters saw themselves as "guardians", as in the construction of monastery walls and mediating with the bureaucracy and the villagers.

In the past the forest itself was protection enough against ingression and encroachment but in recent times high walls, circumscribing the monastic community, were an essential feature of the forest monastery. At Wat Paa Baan Poem in secluded Nam Som district, Udonthani, the 192 hectares of remaining forest is in danger of rapidly disappearing. During the time of my visit the monastery had three monks and a novice. The head monk is a pupil of Ajaan In, one of Mahaa Bua's teaching disciples (second generation). When a wealthy Bangkok woman offered 700,000 baht (US\$26,923) to build a 7 kilometre wall around the *samnak*, the offer was timely. The monks



told me they heard chain saws felling trees not far away and heavy timber trucks at the bottom of the mountain. Across the countryside in Ubon, one forest monk at Wat Paa Koh in Phibuunmangsaahaan district told me that at night he could hear trees being illegally felled in surrounding national park. Even some of the monastery's barbed wire is taken by villagers during hunting incursions inside the monastery.

Monastery walls (usually topped with broken glass, barbed wire, and the like) besides spatially defining the sanctified forest from the profane, laicized social space, are an emphatic symbolic statement of resistance to the outside world. Forest monasteries are often situated inside forest reserves and boundaries without ritual delineation and are especially susceptible to incursions by illegal loggers or resourceful villagers seeking forest products, or new agricultural land. However, as mentioned below, in some areas under intense land pressure in recent times even monastery walls provide no guarantee of protection for the forest and forest monks.

In general, the forest monastery functions effectively as a nature reserve and refuge for those wild animals which are still endemic to the northeastern countryside (mainly wild pigs, mouse deer [*kajong*], monkeys, and reptiles). The walls, together with a firm teacher, often help to restrain local poachers and keep village dogs out. In a number of forest monasteries visited where there was no clearly demarcated boundary, tensions had developed between forest monks and some local villagers hunting or seeking timber for building or firewood. The issue became one whereby the definitive sacred area, where there was any doubt, was no longer recognized. The rational exigencies of survival with increased pressure on scarcer resources became priority. The spatial conception of sanctity became redefined, often in ever-decreasing concentric circles around the *sangkhaawat*, consisting of the monk's dwellings (with the teacher's hut as the main focus of attention). In so far as the villagers are concerned, in rational terms the forest and the monastery (as a spiritual sanctity) have different functions. But with the forest monks, the two are a singular concern, indivisible and ritually linked.

The concern of some forest monks in the light of the above remarks is perhaps understandable given that with the destruction of the forest monk's traditional habitat goes his immured life ways. This point may not be fully grasped by one of the principal urban institutions which has supported forest monks in recent years, EGAT's Buddhist Association (see previous chapter). Perhaps the disinterest with the forest monks' habitat and conservation in general by EGAT executives is understandably ambivalent as the institution



has been responsible for much forest clearance in the past (though blaming the settlers following in the tracks of the incursive roadways), as in the recent Nam Jon Dam controversial proposal (see, for instance, Hirsch and Lohmann [1989, pp. 445–48]).

A particularly destructive practice carried out by some northeastern villagers is to burn scrub and trees to chase out wild animals (squirrels, large lizards, wild pigs, and so on). This may result in the destruction of a part of the forest. At night, or early in the morning when the monks go on alms-round, are likely times when village men and boys come into the monastery for hunting or collecting wood, rattan, or bamboo. Even formidable monastery walls have not prevented this ruseful incursion into the sanctity of the forest monastery.

At one forest *samnak* in the minor district of Naa Yuung in the backwaters of Udonthani, monks keep a constant vigil against incursions. At another monastery, Wat Thamsahaaitham in the Phuuphaan mountain established in 1985, there are pervasive changes taking place in the relationship between the village (Baan Phaasing) and the *samnak* 5 kilometres away. Inside the *samnak* there is still dense forest (*paa thueb*) and before the teacher came, the monastery used to be a communist stronghold (*khet siidaeng*). But even until some years afterwards, villagers did not venture near the area. In stark contrast, though officially “forest reserve” (*paa sa-nguan*), outside is now all cassava gardens. Villagers occasionally come into the monastery to take much-needed wood for building or making charcoal. The only large trees standing in the surrounding countryside are those with an official notice affixed warning villagers not to “trespass, cut trees, destroy or burn the forest”, signed by the Internal Security Operation Command (a remnant of the time when the district was a “Red Area”).

At Wat Paa Baan Taat (Meuang district, Udorn), one monk told me the story of a local hunter who climbed the monastery walls at night time (these were completed in the 1970s) to lay traps for squirrels. The rodents were so tame they simply walked into the traps. When Mahaa Bua came to learn about this he was displeased and a short time later the local hunter apparently went mad and died. Showing obvious displeasure at the behaviour of the local hunter but little pity at his fate, some monks later refused to go and perform mortuary chants.

These examples above need to be considered in view of the rapid increase in population,<sup>18</sup> related cognatic pressure for land and resources over the past ten to twenty years. Northeastern settlers were caught in a compromising



situation over the traditional hiving mode of establishing a new domestic unit or farmstead (more contentiously in national forest reserves) — what Uhlig (1984, p. 156) called “fringe expansion”. In the nineteenth century Low (1839) noted that in the north (as elsewhere) “waste land or jungle may be occupied by any man who may choose to take possession; his having cultivated it [after three years of continuous farming] establishes his right therein” (ibid., p. 253). This has stood good until recent times among “spontaneous” settlements (Uhlig 1984, p. 125, *passim*) and related to this the reason why the government is loathe to take any action removing squatters from remote “protected” forests. Perhaps as one forest monk remarked, rather than looking outwards, villagers today need to reshape their cultural practices to increase productivity and maintain soil fertility on existing cultivated lands. The government must also resolve the complex issue of land rights and legal ownership in the frontier. But in fact neither has happened and the significant increase in absolute and relative productivity over the past two decades was due to continued clearing of new lands at the expense of the remaining forest reserves (ibid., p. 249, see also the next chapter).

Defining social space for symbolic and pragmatic reasons by constructing walls around forest monasteries is important to urban élite whose own homes are similarly protected. At Wat Tham Klong Phen the estimated 7 kilometre wall consists of sections of about 3 metres in length costing around 3,000 baht (US\$115) per section with the donor’s name painted on the top of each section. It is clear from a cursory glance that the names and ranks are of high-ranking individuals. If villagers wish to support a forest monastery it is normally in terms of manpower, or offering food (mainly glutinous rice with home-made sweets) and sometimes even a collective effort to sponsor the construction of a monk’s hut. Even in the latter situation, most of the materials and all the labour are provided by the village.

Within the forest *sangha*, as noted earlier in this chapter, the most profound changes take place on the decease of a teacher. At this point, because of the individuated function of charisma (as distinct from institutional forms), pupillary succession becomes somewhat amorphous and problematic with groups of former pupils dispersing in different directions<sup>19</sup> (see Weber’s related discussion [1968, p. 55]). Since ancient times leadership was considered non-transferable to any particular pupil (see Gopaka-Moggallana Sutta in the *Majjhima-nikaya*).

In the contemporary forest tradition “pupillage” has tended to give the appearance of a persisting institutionalized cult built around the teacher by



pupils, and as a “continuous institution” (Tambiah 1984, p. 392 n.) — similar to the Sinhalese *pansala* (small ramified monastic residential units in the Siyam Nikaya). Each *pansala* function as independent corporate-like groups named after the head incumbent who appoints his own successor in his will (normally a nephew, that is, sister’s son). The head monk determines the pupillary succession for the next one-and-a-half generations as he selects the pupil for his own senior pupil (Gothoni 1986, pp. 15–17). Returning to the Thai forest tradition, as a result of this diffraction, pupils form new pupillary alignments. And again the integrality of this dyadic relationship will endure only as long as either the pupil decides (on his own free will) to go elsewhere, or he may be asked to leave the community (lack of conformity), or then again until such time as the teacher dies.

As in the case of Wat Paa Sutthaawaat mentioned above, forest monasteries become fundamentally changed by the presence of institutionalized *pariyat* monks intent on academic pursuits, scriptural studies, and administrative careers. Most of the monks which took over parent monasteries after the death of the founding teacher were of this category (affirming the monastery’s domesticated status), or in some cases monks succeeded as abbot by virtue of the fact that they were related through kinship to the deceased teacher (and thus cognate proximity to the source of original charisma).<sup>20</sup> These new monastic heads take over the forest monastery during its routinizing phase where the monastery, though maintaining symbols of its primitive past, is no longer the residence for ascetic practitioners.

Changes among the resident *sangha* facilitate structural changes inside the monastery (with emphasis on administrative functions, ritual services with the laity, and teaching Pali and *dhamma* courses), as noted earlier in this chapter. As mentioned in the case of Phra Khruu Kittiworakhun in Chapter Four, some *pariyat* monks resident at established monasteries claiming lineage affiliation to Man saw this in terms of an evolutionary progression, from the monastery’s humble liminal phase to a rational, functional institution. In Weber’s terms (1970, p. 262), individuated charisma recedes with domination by the institutions during the weak phase of a teacher’s life and into “lasting institutions”.

The pupillary configuration described here, despite giving the appearance of stability as in corporate groups, needs to be distinguished from traditional monastic orders (*nikaai*).<sup>21</sup> Higher ordination (Pali: *upasampada*) is integrally bound up with ordination lines (*parampara*), pupillary succession with preceptor (*upatchaa*) and ordinand (*naak*) (Tambiah 1976, p. 352). The



preceptor and teacher (*ajaan*; Pali: *acariya*) may be one and the same, but as Placzek (1981, p. 174) notes, this is more likely to be found among the sedentarized domesticated *sangha*. Because forest monks (and not just forest monks), since monastic reforms around the turn of the century and new administrative regulations, cannot perform higher ordination (*upasampada*) so easily, prospective pupils must seek ordination elsewhere and then move to the forest monastery. In fact forest monks interviewed showed little inclination to take on bureaucratic responsibilities (noted also by Ouay [1978, p. 6]). Also, most forest monasteries were not sanctioned to carry out ordinations under national *sangha* regulations as they had no officially consecrated area (*siimaa*). But as we have seen earlier, forest monasteries do not retain their primitive mode and in the latter part of the founding teacher's life, change into fully fledged institutionalized monasteries affiliated to either Thammayut or Mahaanikaai.

The modern northeastern forest tradition has to be conceived in terms of networks of pupillages (sub-lineages, *klumyoi*) claiming affiliation to Man. These pupillary bands preferred settlement in the northern part of the Northeastern Region, such as in Norngkhaai (Thaabor, Sii Chiang Mai, Phonphisai, and Beungkaan districts); Nakhorn Phanom, Siisongkhraam, and Baan Phaeng districts); Mukdaahaan (Khamcha'ii with Luengnokthaa); Sakon Nakhorn (Sawaang Daendin and Phannaanikhom); Udornthaanii (Baan Pheur, Norngbualamphuu, Naaklaang, Norngmaan, and Meuang districts); Loei (Wangsaphung and Meuang districts). These were the main impact settlement areas and some twenty years ago very isolated (Mahaa Bua 1986b, pp. 151–52; see also Map 2 and note how these sites correspond to the spatial configuration of Man's liminal "impact points" shown on Map 1, mentioned in Chapter Four).

The informal relationship between teacher and pupil cross-cuts ordination lines, though to be able to participate in the formal *Sangkhakam* there were pervasive reasons for seeking re-ordination (I shall return to this again in Chapter Nine). But as we have seen this did not always happen provided pupils were satisfied that they had sufficient interaction with their teacher and were confident in their own practice. Thus I would suggest that rather than simply looking at the institutional linkages in the Thammayut, we need to simultaneously understand the nature of the worldly renouncer and the personalized informal relationship between teacher and pupil.



In the following chapter I shall pursue the social and political factors and processes of change impacting on forest monasteries and the lives of forest monks with further intensity, especially the significance and implications of the rapidly disappearing northeastern forests and responses from some forest monks. Then, I shall shift my focus laterally from the far countryside to the metropolis and to the culmination of recent historical changes and the influences of élite patronage commencing in the early 1960s.

## NOTES

1. Traditionally, a meditation teacher will give an appropriate meditation subject (*kammathaan phaawanaa*) to a pupil. As Mahaa Bua says in his "Kammatthana: The Basis of Practice" (n.d., p. 1), the *kammathaan*, the mental objects (*aarama*) are many. Forty meditation subjects are listed in the texts and the purpose in listing these subjects of meditation are for those interested in the practice to choose the one suitable for one's temperament. "This is similar to disease; there are many kinds and so likewise are the medicines to suit them."
2. See also Yalman (1962), Bechert (1973*b*), Carrithers (1979, 1983), Kemper (1980), and Gombrich (1988).
3. See Evers (1968) on a comparison between the *sangha* in Sri Lanka and that in Thailand, though based on a "loosely structured" conception of Thai society.
4. This is iconically represented in the image of the Buddha as a *thudong* monk in walking Sukhothai-style, complete with *klot*, kettle, and *baat* slung over his shoulder. Interestingly, Griswold (1967, p. 24) conjectures that the standing Sukhothai images represented the town-dwelling order whilst the walking images those of Sinhalese forest dwellers.
5. This is suggested in indigenous chronicles and Sinhalese commentaries from which contemporary Thai religion draws much inspiration.
6. Mnemonic formulae were an aid to the early textual transmission and today traditional Pali chanting in its repetitiveness resonates the primitive mode, with each sentence linked to the next. See Heinze (1972, p. 61), Dutt (1978, pp. 90–910), Cousins (1983, pp. 1–3), and Rhys Davids (1977, pp. xviii–xix).

Frauwallner (1956, pp. 173–74) in an important work explains the general development whereby "in the beginning there is free transmission, during which the text is rendered in free words from memory. Memorial sentences, mostly couched in the form of verses, probably came early to the help of memory ... The passage as an established tradition is marked by the appearance of fixed formulae ... Whenever a subject of common recurrence is treated, it



is couched in the same words ... This generally leads to an established tradition, which fixes the text in a certain version.”

The compilation and editing of the Pali Canon took place over three monastic councils (Theravadin tradition). See, for instance, Thomas (1949, p. 251), Winternitz (1971, pp. 5–6), Schumann (1974, p. 34), and Geiger (1964, pp. li–lxiii). See also Prebish (1974).

7. This is indeed true of most Oriental meditation traditions, from Dogen to Sumarah. In the Theravada tradition perhaps the most profound statement in this regard is the Kalama Sutta in the *Anguttara-nikaya*.
8. See, for instance, article in the *Nation*, 17 February 1989.
9. Interestingly, some forty years ago the charismatic Ajaan Lii made a Buddha image facing the West, which some Thai observers (perhaps surprised at this unorthodoxy) took to indicate that the religion would one day flourish in that direction.

Many forest teachers have visited the West at some time or other since the mid-1970s at the invitation of overseas Thai or Western Buddhist groups. The most notable include Ajaans Mahaa Bua, Chaa, Suwat, Rian, Thet, and Thui. The above-mentioned Lii had been to visit the Buddhalogical sites in India and was profoundly moved by his visit.

10. Interview, Wat Thammongkhon, Bangkok, May 1987.
11. Personal communication with one of Man's now disrobed former pupils, Thongkham Praphaan, January 1989.
12. Accepting money is regarded as an offence taken from the *Nissaggiya Pacittiya* 18 relating to the handling of gold and silver. In early nineteenth century Siam, Crawford (1967, p. 355) notes, there were wide variations in practices over the handling of gold and silver and accepting money.

Phra Panyaawattho (Wat Paa Baan Taat, Udorn) reflecting the more orthodox view remarked to me that there is “no place for money” in the life of a forest monk (see also Placzek [1981, p. 163]).

13. See Khantipalo (1979, p. 120) for a description of the method of making toothpick-brushes. Referring to the same practices, Yalman (1962, p. 320) notes that in Sri Lanka forest monks used “twigs”.
14. See, for instance, Jackson (1989) and Taylor (1990).
15. *Vinaya* rules are full of prologues, introducing the specific disciplinary injunction (detailing the circumstances which the Buddha made a particular rule). Many of these have become redundant over the centuries; though it seemed to me that forest monks attempt to maintain the monk's discipline in the full flavour and context of universal relevance.



16. Dr Amaraa's claim as a meditation teacher derives from her long association with Ajaan Mahaa Bua and then Mahaa Bua's senior pupil, Ajaan Singthorng, until his death in 1980.
17. The term "taa" means maternal grandfather; "puu" meaning paternal grandfather. The former, with the royal/monastic "luang", according to some informants means a somewhat more intimate familiar relationship when used as a mode of addressing monks; the latter, "puu", is more formalistic, distant, and respectful. However, I found the choice of using either term in addressing elderly monks to be one of habit rather than non-rigid distinction. I noticed that forest teachers were referred to as Luang Puu, or Luang Phor (father), depending on habit, age, and seniority. Luang Taa, as mentioned above, is usually used for elderly men who ordain late in life.
18. The rural population throughout Thailand between 1962 and 1982 grew by about nineteen million; with Bangkok absorbing only about four million, the remaining fifteen million became "illegal" pioneer settlers in forest reserves (Angel 1988, p. 251).
19. In general the principle of segmentary social systems functions within each Theravadin *nikaya* and "the monkhood as a whole" (Kemper 1980, p. 33).  
 Monastic succession in the Ch'an or Zen meditation schools identifies specific segmentary lines from the time of the Buddha onwards, in pupillary descent. However, unlike the Theravada tradition generally, meditation schools in Mahayana Buddhism emphasize a separate transmission outside the authority of the scriptures, "from mind to mind" (de Bary 1972, p. 208).
20. Some abbots in this latter category include Phra Thepmolii "Samrong" (the late Ajaan Lii's nephew at Wat Asokaaraam); Ajaan Bunlan (Ajaan Suphat's nephew at Wat Paa Baan Taai); Ajaan Phairot (Ajaan Ornsii's nephew at Wat Phra-ngamsiimongkhon); Ajaan Sang Sangkijjo (Ajaan Teur's nephew at Wat Paa Luang Puu Teur); Ajaan Phaang (absentee abbot of Wat Paa Prasitthitham, nephew of Ajaan Phrom); and so on. These early teachers were first-generation pupils of Man (except Ajaan Suphat, third-generation).
21. The word *nikaai* (Pali: *nikaya*) is translated as "group, sect, [or] a collection" in Buddhadata (1968, p. 138). However, it seems to be commonly translated as "sect" (following Weber, and Troeltsch 1960), though most scholars agree that this is inappropriate.

C. Reynolds (1972, p. 10) in line with Kirsch (1967) prefers the term "order". I concur with this definition for reasons outlined by Bechert (1980, p. 67) that a *nikaya* has no similarity with a Christian sect, and Keyes (1971, p. 560 n.), who says that the Thai *sangha* seems to have more in common with



the divisions “between religious orders in the Catholic Church than ... between Protestant sects”. Similarly, Malalgoda (1976, pp. 87 n., 141) and Gombrich (1988, p. 158) prefer to use “fraternity” to “sect”. If *nikaya* is called “sect” what should Theravada be called? On this premise, as Gombrich (1988) remarks, a *nikaya* should thus be a “sub-sect”.



## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *Ecology, Dhamma, and the Ambivalence of Patronage*

I hear and study Dhamma day and night, in all my activities ... problems arise all the time and meet at the heart where each is eradicated one by one in an ongoing fight with the defilements [*kilet*]. I don't go searching through the scriptures for the answers ... but through my own efforts ... This is why I have no need to search outside for people to help me with my problems, and why I prefer living alone. I'm perfectly happy to be off by myself in physical and mental solitude. Questions of life and death are made simpler this way ... there is no one else to be concerned about ... when I cease breathing, that's simply the end of the matter. (Ajaan Man, in Mahaa Bua [1986a])

Thailand's far northeastern provinces, with a rich and variant mystical tradition,<sup>1</sup> have been the domestic cultural arena and field of charismatic sanctity of ascetic monks in the line of Ajaan Man. One reason for the intensity of religious and mystical interest normally attributed to northeasterners is connected with the region's relative isolation and poverty, *vis-à-vis* the rest of the country. In fact, the northeast has some of the nation's poorest provinces<sup>2</sup> and, relatedly, the greatest number of monks and novices including the "largest regional contingent of monks and novices" residing in the capital (Tambiah 1973*b*, p. 75). The northeast thus became a "fertile ground for the monastic vocation" (Tambiah 1978, p. 124), and most probably at least since the Third Reign.<sup>3</sup> Despite obvious revolutionary potentialities (with sporadic millennial outbursts), by and large northeasterners have remained essentially conservative in religious loyalties tending to work alongside the central Thai hierarchy. Indeed, the orthodox religious di-



mension has provided a legitimate basis in which to seek institutional success in the distant metropole, depending on the many and far-ranging informal familial networks (we saw how this had been a pervading influence in the line of Ajaan Man in Chapter Three). As a “bastion” of religiosity, the northeast is an important source of religious legitimation for the centralized political and administrative élite (Tambiah 1973*b*, p. 75).

We also saw in Chapters Five and Six how northeastern forest monks were seen as frontiersmen for the expansionary state, spearheading religious reforms in hard-to-access areas. At the same time, forest monks were religious virtuosi, questers of the liberating norm and as such needed space between social forms (and the institutions which engendered them). As long as the far provinces remained distant, their frontier *samnak* remained relatively circumscribed and immured. In a linear conception, as Shils (1975) mentions, it would seem that the further from the “swollen center” (to use Tambiah’s term [1984, p. 333]), the more attenuated the connection with the state and the weaker the centralized institutional forms. In Sternstein’s words, the central government’s influence “being inversely related to distance from it, ebbed towards the fringes of the state” (1966, p. 67).

Indigenous social and cultural forms may thus maintain some degree of relative autonomy, distant from the “central value system”. In so far as the rural monastic structure is concerned, the imposition of centralized authority took place, as we saw in Chapter Three, during the reforms of King Chulalongkorn. From the vigorous diffusion of institutional lines cast by the Thammayut came the dispersion of pupillary cells in the lineage of Ajaan Man impacting in the far provinces. The social field of the forest monk underwent a luminous transition from the separated and the undomesticated to reincorporation into sanctioned institutional forms and domesticated sanctity. In this chapter, I commence by foregrounding the primordial imagery and symbolism of the untamed northeastern frontier forests.

Informants and texts mentioned that during the time of Man and his contemporaries, the northeast had much unexploited forest, particularly along both sides of the Maekhong and in the mountains around Khoraat (Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa). In the master’s biography (Mahaa Bua 1982, p. 8), we are told how he spends more time in the northeast than anywhere else because of its secluded mountains and forests. It was of course also Man’s home; his sermons and one-to-one teaching were in the vernacular. The biographer gives us a clear picture of the natural environment and sense of isolation and distance from the metropolis and between human settlements,



districts, and provincial towns (see Chapters Three and Four).

In and around Baan Norng Pheur, where Man spent the last five years of his life, the surrounding forest “stretched to an immeasurable distance”. South of the nearby district town of Phannaanikhom it was “all forest and mountains down to the town of Kaalasin” (translated by Siri Buddhasukh). Then south of Kaalasin it included a number of more densely populated towns, such as Roi Et, Siisaket, Ubon, Sangkha and the largest town, Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa. The *thudong* monks preferred wandering further to the north, where there were

abundant places for seclusion in the mountains, caves or precipices, or even under the trees in the forest ... small villages were spaced out great distances apart, some consisting of ten houses ... also villages on the hillsides scattered in the region, each consisting of five or six houses. (Ibid., p. 235)

The villages were linked by an interconnection of forest pathways and, should one stray off the track, one easily became lost. Only a “hunter who had sometimes been off the beaten track would be able to save that lost traveller and bring him to the safety of the nearest village” (ibid., p. 237).

The present picture in the northeast contrasts with that presented above, and now it is even hard to locate some of the *thudong* sites mentioned by elderly informants and in the many written accounts. Mahaa Bua said in a recent sermon to his pupils that a few years ago he went to visit some early forest meditation sites only to find the forest gone. In fact one of the reasons given to me for the movement of ascetic forest monks from the lower, central provinces of the Northeast Region to the far northern regional provinces (Khorn Kaen, Udorn, Loei, Norngkhaai, Sakon Nakhorn, Mukdaahaan, and Nakhorn Phanom) was that even thirty years ago, the population was increasing fast and more land was needed for rice farming. Sternstein (1965, p. 23) estimated a 184 per cent increase in the Isaan population from 1920 to 1960, or 19 persons per square kilometre in 1920 to 55 persons per square kilometre forty years later.

Thet (1978, p. 74) says it became increasingly hard to find secluded mountains, forests, and caves anywhere in the northeast. It will be remembered that the majority of Man's contemporaries and his early pupils came from around Ubon, a medium-size centre with a population in the mid-nineteenth century of between 2,500 and 5,000 people (Sternstein 1966, p. 70; though I suspect by the turn of the century as an important administrative centre this figure would have increased significantly).



Importantly, Ubon was the early centre for the Thammayut's thrust into the northeast and attracted many reform-minded monks seeking reordination. Man's pupils favoured the isolated Phuuphaan mountain range and circumjacent forests, where many eventually settled. The movement and settlement of forest monks was followed closely by administrative reformers and new settlers. But there was another reason for the selection of these frontier sites, as the informants mentioned. Because Ubon was the first northeastern centre to feel the impact of Chulalongkorn's reforms, new Thammayut monasteries concentrated on modernized education programmes and *pariyat* studies. At the same time there was also considerable resistance to wandering meditation monks in Ubon, including Man with his increasing popularity and consolidating band of northeastern followers. It may be remembered that the great northeastern administrative monk, Tisso, at one time drove the wandering monks away from Ubon (see Chapter Five). Forest monks thus tended to move further northwards to relatively undisturbed frontier places (see Map 2, which shows the concentration of principal parent forest monasteries). These places abounded in wildlife and the stuff of hagio-legend involving the polyphonous coexistence of worldly renouncer and nature, to which I now turn.

There are many stories of forest monks taming the wild, as in the story mentioned by C. Reynolds (1972, p. 9) during the Fifth Reign. In this instance a well-known forest dweller, invited to reside in the capital, was able to tame flighty jungle fowl through his supranormal abilities (*aphinihaan*), though it would seem this was a feat many forest monks were accredited with as a consequence of living close to nature. Ajaan Chaa Suphattho told a similar story to explicate a certain point in the practice. Tales such as these, the substance of normative homiletics, easily become grossly embellished in the process of transmission:

We all know how much they [jungle fowl] are afraid of humans. However, since I have lived here in the forest I have been able to teach them and learn from them as well. (Chaa 1980, p. 61)

In fact the purpose of the forest monks' training is bare attentiveness (*khwaammisati*), a psycho-physical attunement to the environment as each moment in the forest is an unfolding and exploration into awareness or mindfulness. The ever-present dangers are regarded simply as an aid in the meditator's practice by confronting the source of fear itself (though in reality little comfort to monks who have not yet attained to the counterpoise of



higher levels of practice). Forest monks told me many amusing tales (though perhaps not amusing when the events took place) of close encounters of a dangerous kind, in which immediate safety (holding up one's robes and running) took precedence over mental control. Nevertheless forest teachers constantly stress this confrontation with the noetic source of fear (as mind-made) and to facilitate exertion in meditation practice (Mahaa Bua n.d., p. 25). Ajaan Lii Thammatharo related the following account when he was meditating in the forest. On this occasion he was in the path of a rutting elephant which charged out of the bush and stopped some 40 metres from his hut. Then:

Hearing his calls I stuck my head out and saw him, standing there in frightening stance with his ears back ... I lost my nerve ... and ran for a large tree ... as I reached it and had taken my first step up the trunk, a sound like a person whispering in my ears: "You're not true. You're afraid to die. Whoever's afraid to die will have to die again". Hearing this, I let go of the tree and hurried back to the hut. I got into a half-lotus [meditation] position and, with my eyes open, sat facing the elephant and meditating, spreading thoughts of goodwill [*mettaa*] ... [until the elephant] turned around and walked back into the forest. (n.d. [b], p. 11)

This event was in fact witnessed by a lay observer and rumours soon generated their own force and people came from all over the area to ask Lii for "good things" (amulets). An important theme mentioned in this tale is that of the dispensation of goodwill or loving-kindness which informants generally believe forest monks cultivate by living in the wild. Carrithers (1983, pp. 290–91) observes this attitude among the Sinhalese forest monks, saying that one forest teacher taught his pupils to view animals as "fellow-sufferers ... of uncertain temperament ... therefore to be neither afraid nor aggressive towards them". Carrithers goes on to say that in more than twenty-five years no monk had been attacked at the forest hermitage, although villagers had been attacked and killed. In Thailand, similarly, I have not heard of any forest monk being harmed, neither has any forest monk I met heard of other monks being harmed, except from insects.

So what protects ascetic monks from the forest dangers? Perhaps the affinity, or symphysis which accrues from man living close to nature for some time, learning to harmonize with nature's pulsations, its repetitive diurnality (cycles of birth, decay, and death). There is also a mental attitude, as forest monks explained, with moral-purity (*siin*) and goodwill (*mettaa*) which act as "protection" (*porngkan*) against the nether world and wild animals.



In Thailand, as in Sri Lanka, popular stories similar in tone to the *Jatakas*<sup>4</sup> abound around the lives and experiences of forest monks. There were forest monks who were known to be able to communicate with certain wild animals and teach them *dhamma*, as with the earlier-mentioned Ajaan Chorp Thaanasamo (Wat Paa Khokmon, Loei) and tigers. Chorp would often see large tigers during his meditation which would disappear into the bush and once asked Man why he had these repetitive visitations. The master supposedly told him that these were simply *thep-nimit* (visions of celestial beings or *thewaa*) which had come to help him overcome his long-time fear of tigers (Mahaa Bua 1986*b*). When I interviewed the octogenarian monk in 1988, though unable to communicate much, Chorp confirmed the veracity of these tales of his early wandering life.

Khantipalo (1965) writes on the many Thai stories “of extraordinary affection” between forest monk and wild animals and the canon is replete with such tales providing an easily accessible source of inspiration for the aspiring renunciant (every village monk has a boundless supply of such didactic tales). The Buddha is typified as a worldly renouncer who seeks solitary confines for meditation, with only the company of wild animals, “terrifying except to one who had attained great concentration and detachment” (Warder 1980, p. 225). I was told of a tale from the *Dhammapada Commentary*<sup>5</sup> in which the Buddha asked the novice Tissa, “when you hear the noise of panthers and other wild beasts in this forest, are you afraid or not?” Tissa replied in the negative that when he heard the sound of these animals “a feeling of love for the forest arose within him”. In the *Samyutta-nikaya* (Rhys Davids 1971, vol. I, p. 11) a similar tale of closeness with nature is given where a celestial being told the Buddha that the myriad sounds of the forest at noon, the time when the birds rest silently, seemed frightening. The Buddha replied that on the contrary he found these sounds “enchanting”.<sup>6</sup>

Ajaan Man, in walking meditation at night (*kaandoen jongkrom*) with the track lit by candles placed in lanterns at both ends, would sometimes see tigers strolling past, perhaps following the scent of a buffalo and in complete indifference to the meditator (Mahaa Bua 1982, p. 65). Ajaan Khao Anaalayo related similar tales of his experiences with elephants (Luang Puu Khao biography, in Mahaa Bua [1984, pp. 11–17]). In Sri Lanka, the previously mentioned forest monk Pannananda told of an encounter with a leopard which he noticed sitting on his meditation path early in the morning; he calmly shooed it away and commenced his meditation (Carrithers 1983, p. 85).



The correlation between forest monk and the “untamed” animal world with the many colourful accounts of fearlessness and integrality of man and nature signifies the meditator’s taming of worldly sense desires (see also Tambiah [1984, p. 128]). Because the secluded meditator, conterminous with the wild, learns to control instinctive proclivities (fears, lust, and so on) he is in effect the very image of purity through self-mastery. Thus by pacifying animal desires and mental impurities (*kilet*) the forest monk is understood to “not only subdue but to incorporate its powers” (Tambiah 1987). Although both forest monk and wild animal are similarly “situated outside society”, the practitioner “transcends the animal state and incorporates and transmutes its lower passions and gross energies” (ibid., p. 120).

Despite sharing common boundaries (conceptually and spatially) with wild animals, unlike the latter, forest monks assert a radical critique of the social order (which Keyes says, is thus not unlike communist insurgents).<sup>7</sup> In the case of forest monks, the decision to turn away from routinized institutions and live in the forest is a positive statement of “giving up”, and thus an exemplary expression of purity; rather than “taking up” in the sense of militant opposition to society. For the forest monk, the solitary habitat in effect facilitates the practice of detachment and deconditioning from the world with its endless cravings and desires. Canonical texts with which forest monks are most familiar are resplendent with the primordial imagery of the forest life; the Buddha, as we have seen earlier, was never at a loss to praise his forest-dwelling pupils. As Ajaan Chaa (1980, p. 60) says, this was because the “physical and mental solitude ... [of living in the forest] is conducive to the practice for liberation”. Indeed, for forest monks, spirituality and the natural environment cannot be separated. I have already mentioned in an earlier chapter that forest monks (those who did comment) felt that with the destruction of the forest habitat, the means to attaining the liberating norm becomes difficult. Yet with few exceptions, forest monks were disinclined to take an active stand against encroachment from the outside world, and although sensing their imminent disappearance remain on the whole emotionally indifferent. In fact, as one would expect, political posturing was generally frowned upon by the exemplary renunciant.

However, a few forest teachers have been encouraging tree planting, and in their sermons impress upon villagers the importance of conserving the environment. Man’s third-generation pupils Ajaan In (Wat Paa Kham Noi, Udonthanaai) and Ajaan Thui (Wat Paa Daan Wiwek, Norngkhaai — discussed below) are two notable examples. Ajaan In went wandering in



isolated Nam Som district (Udon province) some nine years ago and was eventually invited by villagers to settle and establish a *samnak* in a forest 2 kilometres from the small hived village of Baan Naa Kham Noi. Ajaan In told me that when he first went on alms-round wild elephants would follow him and before he entered the village disappear into the dense forest. Now, less than a decade later, the forests have gone with the elephants. New rice lands and upland cash crops (maize and cassava gardens) dominate the countryside. Seemingly, had the *samnak* not been established, even its forest would have gone in the ensuring denudation by illegal loggers and new settlers.

### DHAMMA, SUBSISTENCE, AND RESPONSE TO CHANGE: THE CASE OF AJAAN THUI

I now turn to a case-study of how one forest monk responded to changes to the environment, linked to the need for adaptive, sustainable cultural practices.

As I often heard from forest monks, it is becoming increasingly necessary to stay put, not to wander around, in order to keep what is left of the northeastern forests. With one's back turned, the forest monastery is prey to the resource-hungry villagers. Thus, due to external circumstances some of the younger pupils of Man have become increasingly conscious of conserving the environment. During the time of my visit, Wat Paa Daan Wiwek (over 112 hectares of forest) held a "tree planting day" in abutting land with native species now rarely seen in maturity in the district. This involved the active participation of the nearby village of Baan Saeng Arun, with the presence of various district government officials (including the forestry officer — not to be left out) and media coverage by the army's Channel Seven Network (seeking material for its highly publicized "Green Isaan" [Isaan Khiiew] project). The teacher, Ajaan Thui Chanthakaro (born in Sakon Nakhorn province, 1933), did not want excessive publicity, afraid of the nation-wide attention the monastery may subsequently receive and risk of spoiling. In encouraging the replanting of indigenized species, Thui also seemed acutely aware of the problems associated with the existing government policy of promoting monoculture planting of exotic eucalyptus (seen everywhere now in the northeast, and not without some local resistance articulated through non-governmental organizations [NGOs] and a few village leaders).

In pragmatic fashion Thui and forest monks like him do not simply



believe in the power of persuasion to solve this problem unless the people can first accept the result of their actions. Slowly, as he sees it, individuals will come to see the cause of suffering (*thuk*) to themselves and others through ignorance and habitual, inadapative learnt behaviour. Thui said that in less than fifteen years the forest in the area had disappeared and as a consequence the people were simply “killing themselves” (*khaa tua-eng*).

The forest is vital for the livelihood and well-being of the villagers, as well as practising ascetic monks. Despite the fact that the surrounding area consists of forest reserve, there are now only a few tall trees standing with cassava gardens right up to the monastery walls. Thui often talks to the villagers when they come to see him about longer-term problems relating to habitual forest clearing. When Thui first arrived it was selective felling by commercial loggers of valuable hardwoods, especially rosewood (*maiphayung*), followed close behind by total clearing for rice fields and cash crops for the world livestock feed market. Indeed, Thailand's entrance into the world economy and the penetration of capital and state into the periphery beginning in the 1950s had far-reaching consequences for the nation's forests and its settlers.

Thui first arrived from Sakon Nakhorn in 1969 to practise meditation in an isolated site called the “pink forest” (Dong Sii Chomphuu, another name for the monastery). He had been ordained in the Thammayut and was a pupil of Bua Siripunyo (Wat Paa Norng Saeng) for nineteen years and then, after his death, Khao Anaalayo (Wat Tham Klong Phen). More recently, after Khao's death, Thui came under the pupillage of the lineage head Ajaan Mahaa Bua (Wat Paa Baan Taat, Udonthani province).

Around the time that Thui established his monastery, the village of Baan Naa Khaam 5 kilometres away was settled by migrants from more densely populated areas in Ubon, Roi Et, Mahaasaarakhaam, Kaalasin, and Khorn Kaen. A short time later a newly hived village of Baan Saeng Arun was established 1 kilometre from the forest monastery (see the survey in Appendix B). There were many deaths during this settlement period from rampant malaria, and not all early settlers decided to stay.<sup>8</sup> Not long after Baan Naa Khaam was settled, villagers, though continuing some support to the forest *samnak* (then known as Wat Paa Naa Khaam), built a Mahaanikaai monastery — Wat Baan Naa Khaam — inside the village and brought in one monk. During the rains retreat of 1988, there were fifteen monks and novices, and out of the rains retreat, only one to three monks; this reflected the importance given to the traditional three-month rite of passage for “raw”



(*khon dip*) young boys. The monastery became centrally focused as a local “ripening ground” for young boys from a number of new surrounding hived villages. Thui, as with other orthodox forest monks in Man’s lineage, would not accept traditional transitional ordination at his monastery.

In the early days, Thui went on alms-round to Baan Naa Khaam and another smaller nearby village, Baan Klorng Khem. Baan Saeng Arun, which today provides most of the day-to-day support, had not yet been established. The forest monastery started to attract outside interest since the early 1980s. In 1987 the monastery received its “royal” temporary consecration (*wisungkhaamasiiimaa*) around the communal hall (*saalaa*). This consists of eight boundary markers 80 × 40 metres within which the sanctified acts of the *sangha* can be carried out. Thui’s purpose in having the *siimaa* was to permit the performance of higher ordinations from time to time, with a visiting preceptor from the newly established nearby Thammayut town monastery in So Phisai district. Previously, interested candidates for higher ordination had to go to either Norngkhaai or Beungkaan some 80 kilometres away. Although Thui now has a *siimaa*, he is nevertheless very strict and has set down firm guidelines for prospective ordinands — contrasting with the easy access in village monasteries (I have provided a translation of the forest monastery’s printed regulations concerning ordination in Appendix E).

Thui is known for his profound knowledge of *dhamma* (*miiphuum-thamsuung*) and intensely practical understanding of bush-craft (like many former wandering forest monks). Before the *phansaa* of 1988, Thui’s monastery had seventeen monks and two novices (compare this with the figure for Wat Baan Naa Khaam above). There was also one *phaa khao* (male eight-preceptor dressed in white) waiting approval for ordination and one long-time resident *chii phraam* (a female eight-preceptor who does not shave her head and thus, it is believed, is better able to maintain social links with the outside world) — distantly related to the royalty. There are occasional Bangkok visitors, lay meditators, and one or two other temporary *chii phraam* (one an influential retired academic and friend of the royalty mentioned later, the other a younger sister of the Norngkhaai entrepreneur Kimkai, discussed in Chapter Six). Thui’s linkage with influential élite helped to facilitate dialogue with local bureaucrats, and resultant attention on matters such as road repairs, bridge maintenance, or general village concerns.

Most of the monks at the forest monastery are well educated and come from many provinces throughout Thailand. This diversity of well-educated monastic inmates reflects Thui’s selectivity and is a common feature of most



forest monasteries under a strict teacher. Kirsch (1967, p. 148) notes this feature at a forest monastery first established around 1940 on donated land near his minority Phuuthai village in Nakhorn Phanom, compared with the homogeneity of the village monastery. As expected, most of the resident inmates at Wat Dong Sii Chomphu seemed better informed about the environment and the consequences of extensive deforestation than the village monks.

The area around Wat Paa Daan Wiwek was under surveillance in the early 1970s and classified as a potential communist stronghold or "pink area" (*khet siichomphu*). It was assumed that when the trees disappeared, so would any enticement for insurgents, along with the debilitating fevers; thus in a sense breaking new patterned ground for national development. Therefore extensification, forest clearing, and settlement were encouraged by the government and the military as a means of domesticating and civilizing the forests in the far provinces.

Thui talked about the forests and wildlife in So Phisai and Paakhaat districts when he first arrived and said that he feared bears the most. He recounted that Ajaan Man, when walking through the forest, would make a whistling sound to warn bears of his approach. Thui said that bears, unlike tigers, if encountered suddenly will tend to attack rather than turn and run. The forest canopy where Thui eventually settled was so dense, and the ground so damp that the only place he could light a fire was in a small clearing on a rocky outcrop (*daan*). This was where he built the first *saalaa*, which was later moved to its present site.

The past two decades have brought about momentous changes to a countryside now largely deforested. On some of the government's cleared land, experimental rubber trees were recently planted and it is thought these would be ideally suited to the micro climate. The modern world is fast catching up with the isolated hamlet of Baan Saeng Arun. This village was one of the last in the district to receive electrification, which was in the process of installation during the time of my visits. Thui had forewarned the villagers of the consequences of changes to their life-style with electrification, and particularly increased financial burden on the community. Nevertheless every household interviewed saw colour television as a much-desired commodity.

Like many northeastern forest monks, Thui does not like to leave the forest and is suspicious of the artifice and political machinations of the urban world (including urban Buddhist cults which appeared in the mid-1970s).



He will not permit himself to be photographed, unless with prior permission and then only in the context of orthodox monastic rituals. Thui was wary of personal photographs which could end up being sold as religious artefacts in the metropole, or appearing in one of the many popular periodicals on charismatic monks and the magical arts.

Although receiving only primary education, Thui and others of his generation had great veneration for written material. He will only destroy printed matter with the Brahmanical pure fire and will readily reprimand anyone who happens to leave a text (particularly one that is religious) in a “low” position. As a novice, Thui was taught the sacred Khmer *Khorm* and Lao *aksorn tham*, knowledge which has become redundant today (compare this with Tambiah’s [1970, pp. 119–21] village study over twenty-five years ago when *aksorn tham* was still actively taught). In fact up until the twentieth century reforms and Wachirayaan’s revision of Pali and *dhamma* studies (see Chapter Three), *Khorm* was still taught in the northeast. As well, Thui was taught the mystical *yan* (sacred markings) and *khaathaa*<sup>9</sup> when he was young but later discarded this traditional learning for reform orthopraxy and the meditative life after the fashion of his teacher.

The many prominent lay visitors and supporters of the monastery reflect its élitist status in the locality and include senior public servants, the local police chief, some teachers, wealthy traders, medical practitioners, and so on. But villagers also see the teacher from time to time and especially at calendrical Buddhist festivities.<sup>10</sup> Thui makes an effort to cultivate a good relationship with the local headman, a migrant from Khorn Kaen in the early 1970s with a reputation for being an articulate and skilled organizer. On Buddhist festivities when villagers are permitted to come to the monastery *en masse*, Thui may take the opportunity to sermonize on “right living” in harmony with the environment, including the children who he believes should be more responsive and better able to come to terms with environmental problems than their parents.

In order to maintain the cenobitical confinement necessary for the perpetuation of the traditional primitive life ways, Thui regulates times during which visitors may enter the forest monastery. Villagers seemed sensitive to this restriction and said that the monks needed their seclusion for meditation. External interaction with the laity is kept to a basic minimum and villagers are not usually allowed to enter the monks’ residential section of the monastery (*sangkhaawaat*).

In fact the doctrinal stipulation that a “forest monastery” be at least



1 kilometre from the perimeter of the nearest hamlet was being challenged with the natural growth of the village and the need for additional productive land. Thui felt he needed a "buffer" between the monastery and the village and thus negotiated a lease from the Royal Forestry Department for 34 hectares of "treeless" contiguous forest reserve which, as mentioned earlier, was replanted with tamarind and mahogany.

In the past decade, as the few remaining first-generation pupils of the lineage founder become too old to teach, Thui has become the focus for intense elite interest in normative religion. Despite the fact that he has received a great deal of financial support, especially for new buildings, he has firmly controlled growth inside the monastery. The simple timber monks' and nuns' huts, storage shed, *saalaa*, and kitchen are the only buildings in the monastery. Thui would often comment on what he sees as the now-widespread destructive climacteric phase of forest monasteries and the decline of active forest teachers.

The villagers provide occasional chores and daily support on alms-round (though this is sometimes supplemented with additional food provided by urban supporters). In turn, Thui will employ villagers whenever possible to do work around the forest rather than use mechanization or outside contractors and has also helped the village by building a large pond, purchased land for the village's first primary school, rice bank, and a community hall. Thui keeps a strict control over monastery funds, but seemingly much of this money which comes from the town becomes distributed, one way or another, in the village. There can be no doubting the high regard villagers hold for Thui, and they accept his sometimes direct reproachment especially with regard to the environment and morality. Sometimes villagers are upset by Thui's criticisms (he is called a "fierce person" or *khon du*), but the teacher said this did not worry him provided the villagers could learn from their mistakes.

Thui remarked that from a combination of wider economic and political circumstances and habitual behaviour (as cultural practices), villagers are unable to plan ahead and improve the quality of their lives. He likened it to a hand-to-mouth existence with no thought of the consequences, a perpetuating condition of personal hardship, motivated in certain circumstances by "habit" (*nisai*, a word he uses often in this context). Indeed, encouraged in one way or another by the state, early settlers saw little problem in continued expansion of a seemingly limitless frontier. Thui gave some examples of the perpetuation of maladaptive traditional practices. He said that nowadays



the people do not have enough wood to burn their dead and come to the forest monastery to seek assistance to buy increasingly costly charcoal. If the villagers want to catch a squirrel inside the hollow of a tree, they smoke it out, often setting fire to the surrounding bush. In another extreme case, once a villager wanted to eat a certain kind of leaf on a tree inside the forest, but because the leaves were out of reach, he simply cut the tree down.

Thui remarked that most people think that the village maintains and supports the forest monastery; but today, if anything, the forest monastery supports the village. The people are so concerned with eking out a living that they have little time or residual funds for supporting the monastery. In the past, people were also poor, but at least they had abundant natural resources available in the forest. In their insistence on imitating the urban world and modernization, Thui said that they need to reflect on how they can maintain these things and whether it is useful for them in the long run. None of the villagers have a regular income and outside seasonal work is now more difficult to obtain. In fact some villagers depended on work in the Middle East but now this is also harder to obtain, less lucrative than previously and there are also many fraudulent agents.

I have at some length discussed Wat Paa Daan Wiwek and its indefatigable teacher in the context of interaction with the local community to show the responses to development between the village and the forest monastery. Thui is perhaps more active than many forest teachers, but his concerns and involvement in social and environmental issues are carefully framed within Buddhist notions of ecology and the strictures of *dhamma* (embedded in the Noble Eightfold Path). The problems confronting Baan Saeng Arun are not unusual, and in a wider sense reflective of massive macro changes impinging on Thai-Lao villages over the past two decades.

#### LIVING ON THE RIM; ECOLOGY AND FOREST MONKS

In the northeast the elimination of primary forests coupled with traditional settlement practices<sup>11</sup> has reached the point of no return (Uhlig 1987).<sup>12</sup> This has been connected with the development of the national economy (expansion of cash cropping) and polity since the Fifth Reign. For new settlers and loggers the frontier held limitless possibilities; while for the hegemonic state, dispersed, agglomerated human settlements were a means of taming and bringing the frontier under centralized control (Girling 1981, pp. 46–49). These settlements, as noted by de Koninck and McTaggart (1987, p. 340)



in classical Southeast Asian states, defined territoriality. In the frontier, the “extensification” or expansion of land under cultivation in the 1960s meant increasing agricultural output with minimum fuss for the state; though to the detriment of the nation’s forests (Hirsch 1989, p. 37).

As noted in Chapter Three, the political process of modern state formation involved the direct linking of the countryside to the centre of cultural, political, and economic power. This facilitated easier access into the previously isolated and hard-to-reach forests (see also previous chapter). These were forests situated at the terminus of civilization, and even the term for forest (*paa*)<sup>13</sup> carried cultural connotations with being wild, and uncivilized. *Paa* is sometimes linked with a similar word of Khmer origin, *theuan*, implying illegality or something illicit (Haas 1964, p. 221), as used in recent criticisms of urban Buddhist cults functioning outside the establishment (as with Phothirak and his “illegal” ordinations, *upatchaa theuan*; see Jackson [1989] and Taylor [1990]).

As Leach (1964) has clearly shown, language not only provides a classification of things, it also constructs our environment; it places each individual in the centre of a social space which is ordered in a logical and familiar way. Leach (1964) also looks at verbal discriminatory sets, defined as distance from Ego, and corresponding categories of social space. Thus, in the rural Thai context we may state this in the following way:

self > kindred > house > village  
> outer cognatic boundaries > forests (remote)

Further, in Thai language there are obvious discriminatory categories associated with the antonyms *paa* (forest/remote, wild, untamed, uncivilized, savage, illicit, and so on) as negative categories, and the Thai word *baan* (house, domestic, community, village, familiar, settlement, and so forth) as positive categories.

Thus we can begin to see how the nation’s forests are considered hostile places, not easily controlled, disordered, remote, and inimical to national security and well-being, in effect the “antithesis of the social and ritual order of civilisation” (O’Connor 1980, p. 33) and a likely threat to the *meuang*-dominated polity (Keyes 1989, p. 138 n. 16). In the words of Mary Douglas (1966), disorder “spoils pattern”, that is, the ordered or patterned society as a whole; but disorder also implies an unlimited potentiality for creativity and development, symbolizing both “danger and power” (ibid., p. 94). Villagers, like the urban (*meuang*) establishment, envisage “development” and human



progress in terms of their land being “well cleared” for productive agriculture. In real terms, “forest clearing and accessibility as development provides an important link between deforestation and development” (Hirsch n.d., pp. 6–7).

Richard Davis (1974) remarks on the negative attributes associated with forests in the north, such as contraband articles, undisciplined and immoral people. Also, to “‘go to the forest’ means, in addition to its literal sense, to defecate or to enter a cemetery”. The forest is the domain of wild animals, demons and spirits (as Brodrick [n.d.] observed in his travels in Laos in 1939, the people believe there are “numberless demons of the woods and the guardian genii of the wild. ... The forests are fearsome places and best avoided”), and uncivilized tribal people. Nor is there any sense of natural beauty in forests, as all “beauty lies in human settlements” (ibid., p. 13). In addition, the cosmological layout of patterned human settlements corresponds to a hierarchy in which beauty and civilization flows downwards from the towns to the villages. At each stage in this downward process, to the hamlets at the very fringe of the forest, civilization “loses some of its luster” (ibid., p. 14). In the ancient Indic *Vedas*, forests (the *aranya*) were the sacred “gaps” situated between centres of human settlement (Malamoud 1976). These were sites for the dispersed agglomerated pupillages and individualistic wandering hermits, moving between the various sanctified (and purified) centres.

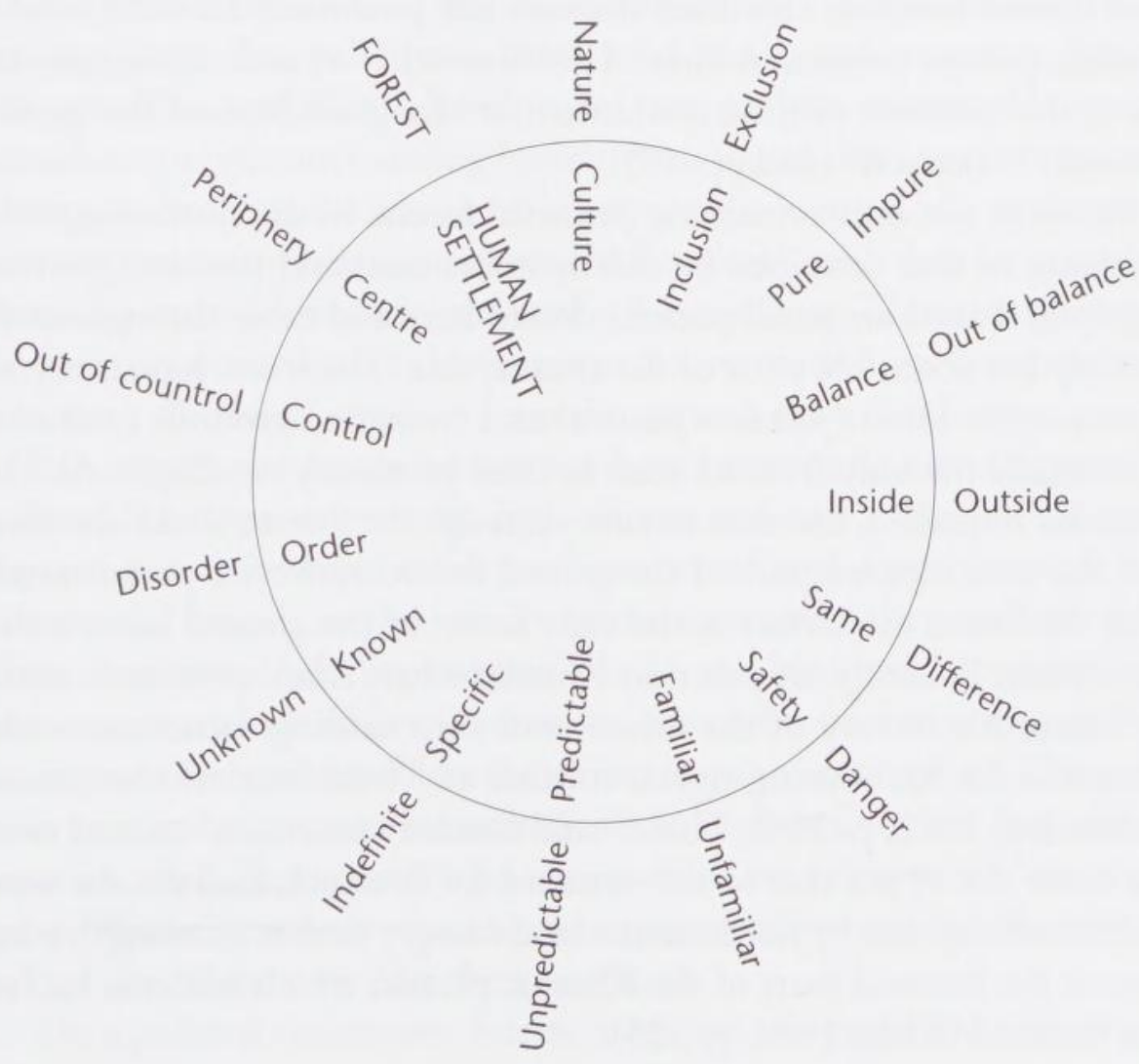
There is another important consideration to the negativity associated with forests and this is the need for domesticated man to be with the “familiar” (Tuan 1988), with kinsfolk and cleared fields. I mentioned in Chapter Five that in some places wandering monks were received with some apprehension and hostility, seen as intimidating the secure, circumscriptive familiarity of the village. “Outsiders” generally may be perceived as potentially dangerous sources of power in contradistinction to their complementary opposite “insiders” which implied “safety” (Mulder 1985, p. 46). Popular religiosity reinforces this basic binary conception in an attempt to create a sense of enduring order out of surrounding chaos and temporal disorder. In the forest, outside of the culturally familiar village, is the ever-threatening presence of malignant powers, wild animals, and strangers — which include wandering monks.

In Tuan’s thinking, strangers and forest are of the same potentially hostile category, situated outside the purlieu of the known world. These are the marginal interstices, the “ambiguous boundary zone” (Leach 1976), and as such all precautions must be taken by villagers to protect themselves from



its likely dangers. Similarly with a person regarded as “polluting” who emerges from these patternless places, the ritual divide (Douglas 1966, pp. 96–97). As well, there is an unpredictable source of power in “inarticulate areas, margins, confused lines, and beyond the external boundaries” (ibid., p. 98) which is manifested in individuals (as potency or capability) occupying this restricted space. Note the following synoptic diagram of pertinent dualities discussed above, adapted from Adams, in Fogelson and Adams (1977).

Worldly beings need to surround themselves with ordered familiarity, to be in control and able to make sense of cosmic order. Thus, as Tuan (1988) remarks, the purpose of civilization is to make “the earth and all that is on it [seem] less threatening, more supportive, more predictable, and more familiar” (ibid., p. 23). That which is outside ordered society, as we have seen, is somehow raw, dangerous, and unpredictable. Forest monks are able to maintain “purity” within this marginal and disorderly ambience due to the spatial and conceptual demarcation between objectified domesticated





sanctity and profanity — the taboo-loaded zone. This involves an unambiguous separation and distance from mundanity, with its defilements and untamed sensuality. In domesticated Buddhism the *siimaa* (a ritually sanctified area) clearly performs this delimiting function, with general consensus as to the social and physical boundaries within the patterned totality of the village (as socially organized space). But in the case of forest monks with a less clearly defined physical boundary than their domesticated brethren, and without a *siimaa*, this ritual “marker” seems to relate more to personalized social space and individuated charisma, along with a particular set of training rules (*winai*) and ascetic practices. These rules (in general pertaining to the integrality of the *sangha*) are highly personalized, individually and communally, and are less evident among village monks more attuned to the socialized calendrical rituals of an agricultural community.

Being out of the ordinary, these special individuals able to coexist with the wild and untamed must have spiritually transcended (through personal conquest) their own mental defilements — the “disordered regions of the mind” (Douglas 1966, p. 95). With the presence of worldly renouncers the forest habitat becomes sanctified (though still potentially harmful) and its symbolic powers possess, in Tuan’s (1988) words, “an aura of mystery and hint of the existence of the superhuman or of a grace beyond the good as ordinarily conceived” (*ibid.*, p. 19).

Presently the only remaining primeval forests in the northeast with a semblance to that described by elderly informants and pre- and post-war biographical texts are small pockets dotted here and there throughout the relatively less accessible parts of the countryside. The forest monastery, the ancestor/spirit forest (*paadorn puutaa*) and cremation grounds (*paa chaa*) are normally the only forested areas in close proximity to villages. As Thui succinctly remarked, less than twenty years ago the forest monks’ dwellings were the only cleared part of the primal forest; however, paradoxically, today the forest monastery is the only forest in the cleared surrounding countryside. Presently, an area near Khoraat where Man spent time among the “unearthly beauty of the forest” and surrounding mountain with a reputation for harbouring tigers, consists of “‘bald-headed’ mountains” (Mahaa Bua 1982, p. 106). These “bald-headed mountains” started to appear since the 1950s due to the demand for livestock feed on the world market and response by northeastern land-hungry settlers growing dry-land crops in the forested parts of the Khoraat plateau which hitherto had not been touched (Uhlig 1984, p. 125).



The forest-dwelling monks may play a vital, sanctifying, and protective role in the remaining forests.<sup>14</sup> Many of the newer forest monasteries are located in and around forest reserves (*paa sa-nguan*) — though the term is a misnomer, as often, except for the forest monastery itself, there are few trees. Much seems to depend on the interest and determination of the forest teacher as to how much surrounding forest he can protect from encroachment. But in many cases external developments have simply followed course, and the dilemma facing ascetic monks is the extent of active participation in community and environmental issues. Most elderly forest teachers were little able to control events inside and outside the monastery (certainly not as stern and resolute as the above-mentioned Ajaan Thui) and watched while the forest was gradually cleared right up to the monks' huts themselves. The now-ailing Ajaan Thet was one such monk; the monastery situated in Norngkhaai province now has only a small patch of secondary forest and shrub, with much of this replanted with exotic pines and eucalypti.

At the late Ajaan Wan Uttamo's monastery in Sorngdao district, Sakon Nakhorn, is a grouping of three separate *samnak* on a large mountain forest reserve (called Phuulek or the "Iron Mountain") 5 kilometres from the nearest village. The present monastic head had to seek assistance from the Sorngdao District Office and influential patrons (*yom upatthaak*) to prevent denudation of the surrounding forest. It was found that some villagers were cutting timber to make houses which are then sold to a dealer in the nearest town (representing business interests in Bangkok), who then buys the completed house and dismantles the timber for re-selling. This strategy went on for years, and managed to circumvent the restriction on the commercial extraction of valuable timbers from the nation's protected forests.

Most forest monks considered that the greatest immediate danger to their primordial habitat were established villagers and new settlers. Whilst many forest monasteries have influential patrons able to largely curtail illegal commercial logging in the vicinity of the monastery, they are little able to effect changes to the village way of life. As an added problem, many forest monasteries are located in mountainous areas where deforestation on slopes has caused severe irreversible soil nutrient loss through erosion. The ground cover in many places now consists of insidious grasses, such as *Imperata*, and a species called *Pennisetum Polystachion*, which the villagers call "communist grass" (*yaa kormmiwnit*) which comes up everywhere and is difficult to control (as the villagers say, like the insurgents).

On a political dimension, forests, as we saw, are associated with negative



and illicit categories, such as insurgency. But despite residing at the fuzzy interstices of the country inhabited during the 1960s and 1970s by communist insurgents, most reform forest monks (those in the line of Ajaan Man) were not considered a threat to the nation-state — although some were closely watched. Interestingly, by comparison, during the 1950s in Sri Lanka, forest monks were accused *en masse* of being communist by the establishment clergy (Yalman 1962); no doubt because of their outspoken and critical behaviour towards institutional authority, and functioning too far outside normative institutions. In Thailand, as we saw in earlier chapters in the case of Man and his first pupils, when moving on the outside there was always the danger of being seen as political activists opposed to the state's power and authority. Tambiah (1978, p. 388) mentions the problem that wandering monks without recognized affiliations (to a monastery or ordination lineage) and proper means of identification may easily be conceived as potential subversives, as real insurgents in the guise of wandering monks could move freely around the countryside.

In the following example<sup>15</sup> I intend to show how a forest teacher in his charismatic field may easily become the focus for social and economic concerns of the immediate community — yet apolitical. In so doing, I shall indicate the various indices of interaction between the forest monk and wider social milieu (a point I shall return to again later).

#### COMMUNITY, POLITICS, AND THE KAMMATHAAN MONK: THE CASE OF AJAAN BAEN

Baen Thanaakaro (Wat Doi Thammajedii, Koksiiisuphan district, Sakon Nakhorn) was a pupil of the late Kongmaa Jirapunyo who, as I mentioned in Chapter Five (especially endnote 3) and Chapter Six, was an early wandering pupil of Man and occasionally a travelling companion of the popular Fan Aajaro. The monastery, like many others in the line of Man, is located in a particularly poor and isolated part of the northeast, the Phuuphaan. Baen and Kongmaa were active in the 1950s, wandering throughout the area and coming into regular contact with impoverished local villages. In the following decade, this area was to be the heartland for insurgency (see below) and, as I was told, the small farming communities were under continual harassment from the security forces. The wandering monks established a warm relationship with the villagers and shared some of their many hardships. In the 1970s, after Baen settled at Wat Doi, he maintained an interest in the



well-being of the local community. In the capital he gained a reputation of being a strong and fearless practitioner living in potentially hostile marginal countryside.

Who or what were the dangers at that time? Baen never directly confronted communist insurgents, and saw only the hardship and daily struggle of the small dispersed isolated hamlets. His duplex reputation as an ascetic meditator (Phra Kammathan) and “development monk” (Phra Nakpathanaa) seemed firmly established in the local community; his development orientation clearly focused ideologically with institutional interests. For example, in recent years Baen facilitated the construction of an all-weather road to the village through his contacts at the Office of Accelerated Rural Development funded by monastery funds, established a rice bank and production credit group (alongside the Community Development Department), and arranged the distribution of used clothing and medicines to the isolated hived communities further into the Phuuphaan heartland.

Even local Mahaanikaai village abbots have sought Baen’s advice and assistance on matters of community development and planning; but here Baen only provides support after first being convinced of the usefulness to the villagers. The financial support to the monastery comes from devotees in the metropole and local élite from the town of Sakon Nakhorn, some 25 kilometres away. Alms-food is received from the nearby village, though since the village has recently built its own Mahaanikaai monastery daily supports have dwindled and additional food has been cooked in the monastery’s kitchen supervised by Baen’s female *chiiphraam* devotee of fifteen years, Khun Sirilak “Toh”, a former successful fashion designer, dressmaker, and former socialite from Bangkok.

As with Ajaan Thui, the élitist following at Wat Doi Thammajedii is noticeable. Baen’s benevolence and sympathetic understanding of local community needs and concerns is an intercessorial means of articulation through which the élite can connect with the villagers. As an example, during New Year (*Phii Mai*) whilst I was staying at the monastery, a well-known Bangkok paediatrician and devotee of Baen came to stay for meditation retreat. He brought with him boxes of T-shirts which he gave out to the village children, lined up in front of the *saalaa* one morning. As with Thui above, a great deal of urban money as monastery oblations becomes distributed in various ways among the local community. Baen sees this as a pragmatic and expedient means of regulating excessive monetary support to the forest monastery, maintaining an equilibrium, and preventing spoiling inside the monastery.



Baen, at the time of my meeting, was sixty years of age and with forty *phansaa*. He comes from a family of six (four brothers and two sisters); the eldest brother is an army officer in Bangkok. As with many forest teachers, Baen's elderly mother (who told me she was "eighty something") stays in the small *mae chii* section of the monastery, behind the kitchen. It seemed she rarely communicated with her son, and refers to him in the usual respectful term indicating social distancing as "Than Ajaan". Forest monks consider the supreme filial act is to teach *dhamma* to their parents, to repay nurturing and the gift of "life". A number of forest teachers would bring their aged mother to their monasteries, and even Man was known to be particularly concerned about his elderly mother, but because he was wandering most of his life had asked one of his early pupils, Ajaan Oun, to take care of her in Ubon (Yaanasiri et al. 1977, p. 58).

Baen's teacher, Ajaan Kongmaa, was first attracted to Wat Doi Thammajedii by its suitability for meditation, with many small caves, nestled in the foothills overlooking the Sakon Nakhorn plain (the monastery has a perimeter of about 5.4 kilometres). After Kongmaa died in a road accident in 1962 not far from the monastery, another pupil, Ajaan Sum, became monastic head for two or three years but was attracted to urban monastic career opportunities and left to become an important provincial monk in the town of Sakon Nakhorn. The monastery has been visited three times by the royalty since the 1970s. Besides visiting Baen, as the monks at the monastery told me, one reason the royal couple used to come was to see the magnificent wild flowers which appear shortly after the rains. This is the time when the king resides in his Phuuphaan palace, the other side of Sakon Nakhorn on the road to Kaalasin. Baen has a small *samnak* called Wat Paa Konoï in nearby Kut-baak with several resident monks and another extremely isolated centre for meditation on top of a nearby mountain. As Wat Doi Thammajedii attracts increasing attention, the monks told me that they appreciate the chance to get to one of Baen's *samnak*, even though the diet is poor and a great deal of strenuous walking is required.

Baen does not regard himself as a "development monk" but sees the monks' role as one of consistent practice in *dhamma-vinaya* and in this regard is very direct, strict, and demanding on his monastic disciples. Now, as Baen gets older and better known, like Ajaan Thui of the same generation, he is attracting a great deal of attention from influential urban supporters — but shuns too much attention and remains inaccessible for much of the day. At the time of my visit (out of *phansaa*) there were thirteen monks, two novices,



and one *phaa khao* (male white-dressed eight-preceptor); two other monks had just gone wandering (*doen thudong*) to one of his branch monasteries.

Baen rarely leaves the district, though the monks said that more recently he has started to accept outside invitations from prominent laity. In recent times there has been a subtle entreaty placed on the teacher by urban supporters (sometimes he will permit lay meditators to stay — mostly well-to-do Bangkokians — for short periods of time) to improve lay accommodation, and already a new toilet and ablution block has been built for an increasing number of metropolitan visitors, perhaps signalling inevitable changes ahead.

Baen makes an effort to be seen disinterested in religio-politics and, though a strict Thammayut-ordained monk, accepts Mahaanikaai forest monks from a reputable teacher in Man's lineage (notably Ajaan Chaa's monks). Baen's disciples told me that he has the ability to read their minds as a corollary of his meditation prowess (see the discussion in Chapter Six) and that this makes them rather fearful of him.

There were many cases of forest monks who were able to combine development activities with meditation and strict monastic discipline. At another Phuuphaan forest monastery — the above-mentioned Wat Aphaidamrongtham in Sorngdao district — Man's first-generation pupil Wan Uttamo (see also next chapter) had a reputation, besides being a meditation master, as a vigorous innovator of a small-scale irrigation project to assist poor farmers in a cluster of surrounding villages. This apparently viable project had been formally presented to the king, and the latter would on occasions visit the project site and nearby forest monastery to talk *dhamma* with Wan until the latter's death in 1980, after which the king never returned.

## THE ROLE OF NUNS AND FOREST MONASTERIES

As mentioned above, many forest monk-teachers would have their ageing mothers staying with them in the nun's section of the monastery (*khana mae chii*). However, it was found that forest monks generally discouraged the residence of *mae chii*, though as in the case of male inmates, the usual rule on selectivity applied, and a restricted number of dedicated female practitioners were occasionally permitted to stay. In only a very few cases in my survey did forest teachers not permit the residence of any female ascetics at the monastery, due to earlier domestic problems among female inmates encountered elsewhere at other forest monasteries.



During the climacteric phase, the number of female inmates usually increases markedly, sometimes far out-numbering the monks and novices and tending to dominate the monastery (see indicators of change, no. 6, in Chapter Seven). As well, factions often eventuate over leadership, duties, and personal contact with the teacher, as the role of females generally in Thai monasteries has little normative regulatory structure.

In fact since forest monks settled more or less permanently, nuns have provided an essential support to the monastery. Because forest monasteries do not normally have resident laity, the *mae chii*, or perhaps *chii phraam*, control the cooking and domestic chores, particularly important at forest *samnak* far from the nearest village (see also Ouay 1978, pp. 25–26). Resident *mae chii* come under the control of the teacher, but in fact have very little contact except at times of calendrical Buddhist festivities or *dhamma* talks on the weekly holy days (*Wan Phra*; Pali: *uposathadivasa*), which the laity may also attend. At some larger monasteries, the teacher will appoint a senior female to act as head of the *khana mae chii*, in a role akin to head housekeeper. Besides cooking additional food for the monks in the morning, at some monasteries female residents also prepare fresh fruit drinks for the monks in the afternoon (meticulously strained to avoid breach of a monastic injunction over the consumption of “food” after mid-day). They may also prepare flowers for the *saalaa*, cleaning around the kitchen area (within the *khana mae chii*), washing, making sweets, gardening, and gathering berries and fruit from the forest. There is a clear division within the forest monastery, and female ascetics are rarely — if ever — seen in the monks’ section (*sangkhaawaat*). As well, the cleaning of the *Phutthaawaat* is strictly the monks’ duty.

#### THE METROPOLITAN COMPACT AND THE SAMNAK CONNECTION

As we have seen, well-known forest monks are faced with a classic paradox whereby, in seeking seclusion, they often become imbibed into new power relations involving the laity. The intensity of special qualities attached to forest monks seems to be correlated with the extent of reincorporation (domestication) within the logic of protection and patronage by the nation’s influential elite. The latter were drawn to the untamed purlieus in search of “good monks” (as normatively defined) whom they identified as being in the lineage of Ajaan Man. Occasionally, Man’s remaining first-generation pupils — and



some second-generation monks — were invited to the capital, becoming enmeshed in what I have referred to as the “metropolitan compact”.<sup>16</sup> It is to this concern I now turn.

A relatively small circle of elite patrons have specially adapted their urban residences to accommodate forest monks after the pattern of Jitladaa Palace (see previous chapter). These residences normally consist of a spatial arrangement of single-room dwellings for the teacher and his small entourage of monastic disciples in a domestic garden setting. As pointed out to me in terms of precedence, the Buddha himself had been invited to reside within the groves and gardens of the state’s rich and powerful; as had the nation’s present “Dhamma Patriarch” — the king (situated at the finial crest of the social order). Both provide ideal types, to be emulated in accord with one’s social position.

If invited to the capital, forest monks today rarely reside in urban monasteries, which their patrons would consider inappropriate for monks so pure (the Bangkok *sangha* has been increasingly discredited in recent times with a number of scandals hitting the headlines). Baan Saeng Tham in Phutthamonthon on the western outskirts of the metropole is a *samnak* built exclusively for Mahaa Bua on his occasional visits to the capital. Then there is Samnak Jao Khun Phayom Yensudjai, situated at Rangsit some 27 kilometres from the heart of the city; this residence is owned by an airforce general (Jao Khun Phayom) and his wife, Khunying Somkhuan, and has been used by many well-known forest monks over the years. The Jao Khun’s wife said they constructed the *samnak* on an adjacent plot in 1972 as an urban retreat for forest monks to escape the surge of metropolitan merit-makers, curiosity seekers, relic-hunters, and journalists visiting the north-eastern forest monasteries.

Khunying Somkhuan first became interested in Man’s lineage from friends and went up-country in a merit-making tour in the late 1960s shortly before Mahaa Bua’s biography on Man was first published. The earlier-mentioned Ajaan Chorp was the first of Jao Khun Phayom’s monks, brought to the capital for medical treatment and, ironically, “rest”. Other notable forest monks such as Ajaans Thet, Orn, Wan, and Lui Janthasaaro, all early pupils of Man, also sought Jao Khun Phayom’s retreat.

Another private metropolitan residence where forest teachers occasionally stay is *samnak* Khun Udom at Saalayaa district on the outskirts of the capital. Sometimes forest teachers go back and forth between various metropolitan *samnak*, in a network of exclusive residences across the capital. When these



monks are in the northeast, their urban patrons will frequently visit them with news of mutual Bangkok friends, travel arrangements for them to visit the capital, special gifts (silk robes are popular in this regard), and so on. At the time of my visit to Ajaan Chorp at hard-to-reach Wat Paa Khokmon in Loei province I met one of Khunying Somkhuan's friends, Khunying Suphaa, with a small group of well-to-do visitors from Bangkok.

One *samnak* set up in the late 1960s for monks in the lineage of Ajaan Man is the Muunithi Phra Aajaan Man, "The Ajaan Man Foundation", situated in Thonburi in metropolitan Bangkok. Normally, younger forest monks from principal parent forest monasteries will stay here when visiting the capital. The *samnak* also sells taped sermons (to support the foundation) by some of Man's nationally famous first pupils.

### THE 1960S AND THE FIRST CONTACTS

Placzek (1981, p. 178) incorrectly notes that initial urban interest in Man's *kammathaan* monks was simply the result of the enthusiasm by a handful of dedicated Westerners seeking meditation masters. In fact, interest in Ajaan Man took place before the first Westerners heard of him, or first sought tuition in Thailand under some of his disciples.

The beginning of the 1960s marks an important early phase in the interest by urban élite in forest monks, led by Dr Ouay Ketsing and a small group of Western-educated Thai meditators. Ouay and a small number of élite like him were seeking rational bases to their own indigenous mystical tradition. These eminent laity were well aware of religio-politics at the time; the Thammayut's expansionary programmes, traditional vocational divisions cross-cut by sectarian hostilities in the 1950s, and the emergent interest in lay meditation in the *wipatsanaa* Burmese tradition (through the Mahaanikaai). They had also heard from prominent northeastern Thammayut administrative monks in the capital about Man's revived forest tradition; a tradition which reputedly replicated classic doctrinal themes. This was the mystical universal core of indigenous tradition which they had searched for and found among the frontier-dwelling meditation monks who, it was assumed, lived like the Buddha and his *arahans* disciples.

Ouay, former Member of Parliament and pioneering medical professor at Sirirat Hospital in Bangkok, along with his wife, Mom Raatchawong Dr Songsii (a former medical practitioner at the same hospital), have long been fervent supporters of forest monks in Man's lineage and in their enthusiasm



inspired many educated Bangkokians during the 1960s. Ouay was born in 1908, came from a noble Fifth Reign family and was one of the first Western-educated Thai physicians to undertake the task of building up public health care in Thailand. In more recent years Ouay has been reviving interest in traditional medicine to promote self-reliance in primary health care among villagers. Ouay also believes in meditation for mental health and encourages his colleagues and friends to practise regularly.

Ouay wrote a popular booklet *Chiiwit Phra Paa*, "The Life of Forest Monks", written for the occasion of Ajaan Fan Ajaaro's cremation in January 1978 (I have referred to this text from time to time), and numerous articles on his experiences with northeastern meditation teachers in the 1960s and early 1970s. Because of his personal credibility, his writing appeared in the most respectable publications. When I visited "Ajaan Mor" (as he is known) at his Bangkok residence in September 1988, he talked intensely of his life and times which I have related below, supplementing the personal narrative with other sources of relevant information.

Ouay, along with his cousin, first ordained at the Thammayut's important Wat Bowornniwet in 1957 for the rains retreat, just as his father before him under the royal Sangkharaat Wachirayaanawong (head of the national *sangha* between 1945 and 1958). In 1957 the nation was celebrating 2,500 years since the beginning of the Buddhist era, a period of spiritual reawakening for many, with thousands temporarily ordaining urged on by a nation-wide campaign. One of Man's more individualistic pupils, the previously mentioned Lii Thammatharo, was one of the driving forces behind the half-millennium celebrations. This was also the period when Phra Phimolatham (Wat Mahaatha, the Mahaanikaai monastic centre) was actively promoting his own "insight" meditation programme, which spread across the country (Tambiah 1976, pp. 259–60). Spurred by the momentum of this programme, the Mahaanikaai produced a number of well-known urban-dwelling meditation teachers, such as Jao Khun Mongkhunthepmunii (Luang Phor Sut, Wat Paaknam) and Phimolatham's successor Phra Thepsitthimunii (see also Tambiah [1984, pp. 168 ff.]).

There is no doubt that the inspiration for the popular *wipatsanaa* movement came from Burma through monks such as U-Narada and Ledi Sayadaw (Tambiah 1987b, pp. 210–11), and at the time of the Sixth Buddhist Council (1954–56) there was a heightened surge of interest in structured meditation courses, in which the laity in some instances could participate on an equal footing with monastic meditators. Mahasi Sayadaw, who



headed the Buddhist Council, was one of the leading exponents of “insight meditation”. Pupils of the Mahasi and other Burmese masters also came to teach in some Bangkok metropolitan monasteries, where separate *khana kuti* were set aside in a quiet section of the monastery for intensive meditation. Thai monks also went to Burma for meditation courses. By the end of the 1970s, however, these teachers and their tradition had virtually disappeared from metropolitan monasteries, though not without leaving a marked impression on urban religion and organized meditation practice.

Ouay explained to me that he was not impressed with Phimolatham’s somewhat liberal interpretive praxis, emphasizing the attainment of “heavenly realms” in progressive stages of meditation. Neither was he convinced that traditional Thai cosmology be simply accepted in its anachronistic form. Ouay turned instead to the Thammayut’s own guided meditation programme every *Wan Phra* (weekly “Buddhist Sabbath”) which had been inspired by the northeastern *kammathaan* forest tradition. At these sessions Ouay found many people with similar backgrounds who were also seeking an alternative to the popularistic national *wipatsanaa* programme (we will see later how these tensions crystallize in sectarian factionalism). The Wat Bowornniwet teacher at that time was the royal abbot, Phra Phrommunii “Phin Suwajo” (mentioned in Chapter Five), who happened to be an admirer of Ajaan Man and after his death, the Kaanjanaburii-born Phra Suwatthano (Somdet Yaansangworn, born in 1913).<sup>17</sup> Somdet’s interest in the forest ascetic tradition had been initially fired by Phin.

Somdet Yaansangworn, formerly Mahaanikaai (reordained under Wachirayaanawong in 1934), was given the task in 1961 of carrying on the increasingly well-attended series of talks and guided meditation for Bangkok’s largely élite participants. But Somdet was not a meditation teacher, and just a year after he started teaching meditation he took over as abbot of the prestigious Wat Bowornniwet and had many administrative concerns. In the introduction to one of his booklets on meditation (Nyanasamvara n.d.), Somdet said that Phin had originally organized a series of *dhamma* talks at Wat Bowornniwet in which he “would present a sermon and then, after the monks chanted, everyone would sit in meditation”. Somdet went on to explain that he carried on this tradition although — in contrast to Phin — he was “not a meditation teacher” and

still had responsibilities concerned with teaching [*pariyat*] and various other duties, and so could not fully practise [himself] to develop ... let alone attaining to a level able to train others.



Furthermore, he said that his “Dhamma explanation therefore always had to depend on the scriptures [as authority], and if ... [he] happened to stray from them” he felt as though he had “lost” his way. It was therefore necessary to follow in the “footprints of those gone before to show the way”, which he frankly admitted he could not manage on his own.

This admission by one of the nation’s leading monks and at the time of writing, the present Sangkharaat (the Supreme Patriarch)<sup>18</sup> is remarkable, but perhaps understandable given Somdet’s relationship around this time with forest meditation masters, which I shall return to later. Nevertheless, because of these meditation sessions and a number of printed articles, Somdet was starting to become known as a meditation adept in his own right, at least in some circles. As Somdet was a high-ranking Pali scholar, this also effectively gave formal credence to practice. There is some suggestion that Somdet’s meditation instruction may have been partly nurtured to countervail the increasing popularity of the successful Mahaanikaai national programme. As Tambiah, quoting an informant, says,

Seeing the success of Phra Phimolatham’s ... program of popularising Vipassana meditation throughout the country, Wat Bovonniwet [Bowornniwet] engaged in a counter-campaign of popularising and celebrating the achievements of the provincial forest meditation teachers. (1984, p. 155)

Essentially the Thammayut were concerned with the intense interest in meditation, both within their own urban monasteries (encouraged particularly by some senior northeastern monks who had known Man in the latter years of his life) and the laity. The Thammayut then turned to its monks who could teach meditation, both forest-dwelling and their more scholastic brethren who, as forest monks said, taught from the head (the intellect) and the book, rather than the “heart” (see the discussion in the next chapter).

Tambiah goes on to say that compared with Phimolatham’s

active propagation of a movement from the centre outward, Phra Yansangvorn’s [Yaansangworn] role is a more passive one of collaborating in the incorporation and legitimation by the centre of achievements that had already been realized in the country’s faraway provinces. (Ibid., p. 184)

This is correct, but Somdet was not in a position to manipulate northeastern forest monks. His relationship with these monks was not always consistent and, as we shall see in relation to Mahaa Bua, eventually somewhat problematic.



Confirming an earlier quotation, Somdet told me (interview, April 1987) that unlike Phimolatham, he was not a meditation teacher. But in the past, because of the resurgence of interest in meditation, he would sometimes teach the laity and importantly, like Phin before him, support the northeastern *kammathan* tradition. He also facilitated the institutionalization of northeastern forest monasteries (he said he had “founded” some forest monasteries). Importantly, Somdet provided institutional credence, ennobling and praising one or two more famous forest monks. Through Somdet many urban votaries and foreigners were able to connect with northeastern forest monasteries. Simultaneously, Somdet has maintained a close relationship with the royalty (see endnote 17) and the nation’s most powerful individuals, and encouraged interest in northeastern masters.

Up until the late 1950s Somdet Yaansangworn had been largely concerned with *pariyat* studies, having attained the highest level in Pali studies (*perian* Grade Nine), but from the beginning of the 1960s shifts his interest to meditation,<sup>19</sup> coinciding as we have seen above, with the Mahaanikaai’s national programme. By the early 1970s Somdet receives a number of enthusiastic Westerners seeking meditation teachers and translated texts from Thai and Pali (many of the latter from the Pali Text Society in London under the control of the English monk Phra Khantipalo, and the Buddhist Publication Society in Sri Lanka) from the Thammayut’s Mahaamakut Buddhist University bookshop.<sup>20</sup> Siri Buddhasukh’s 1976 translation of Mahaa Bua’s biography on Man (not always consistent with the original Thai version, and little read outside English-speaking circles) was eagerly sought by Westerners who had heard about the forest meditation monks from various sources (especially foreign monks, lay meditators, and friends from Western Buddhist Societies who had been to Thailand).

Siri, born in Kaalasin, was a former Thammayut *pariyat* monk and long-time resident at Wat Bowornniwet. He was also active at the World Fellowship of Buddhists’ Sukhumvit Bangkok headquarters, whose international periodical serialized Man’s life and teachings. As Tambiah (1984, pp. 158–59) has shown, the World Fellowship of Buddhists has world-wide connections, and in the 1970s held well-attended weekly meditation classes in conjunction with Wat Bowornniwet’s successful programme introduced many years earlier by Phin. Thus, the northeastern forest monks were starting to gain recognition and a following among Westerners, some of whom decided to stay in Thailand and ordain under the Somdet’s auspices (frequently acting as preceptor), though eventually moving to selected



northeastern forest monasteries after an apprenticeship period at Wat Bowornniwet. Around this time Somdet's relationship with Mahaa Bua was very firm and he would on occasions make brief trips to northeastern forest monasteries.

Since the 1950s, when Mahaa Bua visited the capital, he would stay close to the revered royal Sangkharaat Wachirayaanawong (see also below)<sup>21</sup> at Wat Bowornniwet. Occasionally when residing at Wat Bowornniwet, Mahaa Bua and one or two other forest teachers (such as Ajaans Fan and Singthorng) would give meditation classes in the evenings, when Bangkok's middle class could attend after work. Returning to Ouay's account: besides participating in these sessions, it was here that Ouay read his first book on meditation called *Thipaya-amnaat* "Supranormal Powers" by Phra Ariyakhunaathan "Seng" (mentioned in earlier chapters). Seng, it may be remembered, was a follower of Man in the latter part of his life, but was also a prolific scholar and had been the first to textualize the master's life in the Central Thai idiom. Seng's many publications were widely accessible in the capital in the 1950s and early 1960s through a number of important Thammayut monasteries. Despite the rather perplexing title to Seng's book, it was framed within normative conceptions of meditation practice and contained numerous references to northeastern forest monks. From this book Ouay wanted to find out more about these enigmatic forest eremites and the northeastern *kammathan* tradition.

In 1957, after disrobing, Ouay moved to his family's country residence at Hua Hin and would spend his evenings practising meditation in the surrounding forest, inspired by Seng's book and brief contact made with forest teachers passing through Wat Bowornniwet. Phin's meditation classes generated a great deal of interest and at one such session in which Phin gave a talk on the northeastern *kammathan* monks, he met a well-known England-trained veterinarian named Phairot Khumphairot (1912–88) who was to bring him one step closer to the northeast. Phairot had earlier met with Mahaa Bua at Wat Thepsirin and invited him to his house for the traditional offering of the morning meal. In 1960 Ouay and Phairot went to see the northeastern teacher during one of his brief visits at Wat Bowornniwet. Ouay was taken back by the rigorous appearance of the provincial monk, chewing betel nut (*maak*) and his blunt, though sagacious and direct manner. Neither could Ouay understand much of what Mahaa Bua was saying, in his unrefined provincial accent. Phairot had himself heard about the northeastern forest tradition from an Isaan-born, prominent,



overseas-trained psychiatrist, Dr Jaroen Watthanasuchaat, and a wealthy printer and publisher, Khun Chuan Sornsongkhraam (of Chuan Printing Press, Bangkok; see Phairot cremation volume 1988, pp. 29–32). Jaroen had earlier given Phairot a copy of Man's teachings called *Muttothai* (see endnote 25, Chapter Five). Phairot also subsequently read a number of limited published texts on the life and teachings of forest monks by Chuan Printing.

At the time of Ouay and Phairot's visit to see Mahaa Bua, the teacher had brought with him a disciple who was sick and he asked Ouay to arrange for his hospitalization. Some time later when Ouay was busy at Sirirat Hospital, Mahaa Bua paid him a surprise visit and again asked him for help: this time Mahaa Bua's *upatchaa*, the famous northeastern monk (mentioned in Chapters Three, Four, and Five) Phra Thammajedii "Mahaa Juum", was sick. Mahaa Bua wanted to bring him down to Sirirat Hospital from Udonthaaanii province. Ouay and his wife, Songsii, found him a bed at Sirirat and when the ailing monk was brought down, visited him every day. Thammajedii related many tales to Ouay and Songsii about the northeastern forest monks, especially Mahaa Bua, which they, in turn, related to colleagues and friends.

When Thammajedii recovered sufficiently to return to the northeast he invited them to visit Udorn in the coming dry season. This was 1961 and Ouay, Songsii, Phairot, and another influential woman (Ouay could not remember her name) went to Udorn for the first time by train. They were met at the station by Thammajedii and a small entourage of supporters with an army truck which was to take them to stay with Mahaa Bua at Wat Paa Baan Taat. Although only about 16 kilometres away, the group took over a hour and a half as there were no roads but only rice fields and dense forest outside the town. Here the group stayed for seven days, the first time lay devotees from the capital had stayed at forest monasteries and the vanguard of a surge of tourists over the coming two decades. The Bangkok group, unaccustomed to the basic northeastern staple diet, brought with them their own cook (see also Ouay's account in Khao [1984]) and food supplies. In fact, in later years, nearly all parent monasteries in the northeast had supplies of special food sent by urban devotees and an important source of merit-making (urban informants considered the local diet consisting largely of glutinous rice inadequate).

Up until this time Ouay, and other informants, mentioned that the largest number of supporters of forest monasteries were the villagers and occasional provincial *meuang* patrons. At the time of Ouay's visit there were



only ten monks and a few *mae chii*, though some twenty years later, except for the number of *mae chii*,<sup>22</sup> which has remained constant, the number of monks increased fourfold. After Man died in 1949, many senior pupils went off in various directions and more junior monastic followers (including *mae chii*) aligned themselves with these teachers. Mahaa Bua, though not an early pupil of Man but perhaps his most vigorous and articulate, gradually formed around him his own sub-pupillage after he settled at Wat Paa Baan Taat in 1955.

In 1963 Phra Thammajedii came to Sirirat Hospital a second time, on this occasion for a gallstone operation but died a few days later from complications. Bathing rites were held for seven days at Wat Mongkut after which his funerary urn was placed on a goods train for Udorn with an accompanying entourage of monks. The cremation was to be held at Thammajedii's own Wat Phothisomphon. Ouay said that Thammajedii was less well-known in the capital than in the northeast (where he preferred to reside). Nevertheless, through his contacts at a number of important Thammayut Bangkok monasteries and his initial invitation to Ouay's small group, Thammajedii helped bring Man's lineage to an eager and responsive Western-educated Thai élite.

Following Mahaa Bua, Ouay's group visited Ajaans Fan, Khao, and other first-generation monks which by this time were well into the "settlement phase". Ouay mentions that most of these parent monasteries, being situated in the foothills of the Phuuphaan, were risky places to visit during the 1960s because of the insurgents. Nevertheless he said that when visiting these forest teachers he felt protected by their ambience of loving-kindness and radiant merit-powers. Every dry season Ouay and friends would travel up-country, their tours (and as an off-spin, other tours which followed) getting bigger every year. By the middle of the 1960s, word had swiftly passed around through Bangkok's informal social connections and those meditators who attended Wat Bowornniwet's weekly meditation sessions. Some of these notable individuals include one or two who decided to ordain, including a number of *mae chii* or *chii phraam*. Mom Raatchawong Misakamaan, whom I met at Wat Paa Daan Wiwek, is one such person. She now resides in her own forest hut but was at one time an important public servant for the Tourist Authority of Thailand.

Besides Bangkok families, some wealthy and powerful northeastern families have long supported Man's lineage. There is Kimkai's family as mentioned in Chapter Six, and a Sakon Nakhorn-born Phuuthai busi-



nessman named Kaanii Manorak and his family, now resident in Udorn and running one of the largest movie distribution companies in the northeast. Kaanii, now retired, was originally from Baan Norng Pheur, where Man spent the last five years of his life and had supported the master as a humble lay devotee. In the early years of Mahaa Bua's settlement at Baan Taat, Kaanii was responsible for collecting funds (*khon ruab ruam ngoem*) for Mahaa Bua and had looked after the now-deceased Ajaan Lui when he was resident in Sakon Nakhorn. Kaanii's daughter, Khun Jaemjan, is a friend of Khunying Somkhuan at the Rangsit-based *samnak*. Then there was Khun Phaopha-ngaa, who spent the last twenty years of her life going back and forth to Wat Paa Baan Taat. In 1975 when Phao contracted incurable cancer, she spent four intensive months with Mahaa Bua then returned to Bangkok and died some eight months later. Some followers of Mahaa Bua believe that his finest sermons on *dhamma* for the laity were given during this period. The Phao-phaawanaa (meditation) Foundation in Sukhumwit Road was subsequently established to promote the teachings of forest monks, along with various charitable works.

Khun Phaopha-ngaa (Phao) had been a successful businesswoman and co-founder of the lucrative Southeast Asia Insurance Company. Her father had been the founder and president of the Suraphaanit Aluminium Company. Khun Phao had worked with another patron of forest monks, Khun Wilaat Maniiwat, a well-known writer for *Sayaamrat*, a weekly magazine. Maniiwat is the husband of the earlier-mentioned Suriiphan (see Chapter Six), former Member of Parliament, EGAT executive, and possessor of miraculous *arahan* relics.

Another prominent patron of the northeastern forest monks is Dr Chao na Siilawan (also mentioned in Chapter Six), at the time of writing chairperson of EGAT and the king's privy counsellor. He is sometimes seen up-country officiating at various functions at forest monasteries, such as the opening of *jedii*, new monastic buildings, or remembrance celebrations for famous forest teachers. His wife, Khunying Khaisii, was also a prominent supporter and patron of forest monks and she died in the ill-fated plane crash of 1980 in which five well-known forest teachers were killed. In fact, as we saw earlier, these monks were on their way to the palace at the king's invitation and Khaisii had apparently been sent by the palace to convey the royal invitation. Both Chao and Khaisii had been long-time supporters of Ajaan Khamdii Phaphaaso (1905–84), a pupil of Man's close disciple, Sing Khantayaakhamo. During one of my visits to Loei, Chao — as representative



of the king — was officiating at the opening of Khamdii's relic-museum at Wat Tham Phaapuu. It is to Khamdii's life history that I now briefly turn.

Khamdii had wandered extensively between Khoraat, Phakthorngchai, and Khorn Kaen in the 1940s. In 1955 he set off from Khorn Kaen to Loei with a small band of followers (including Ajaans Thorn, Siithon — the present abbot of Wat Tham Phaapuu and Khamdii's biographer — Nuu, and Sen). Khamdii established his base in a deserted monastery with many caves about 10 kilometres from the town of Loei. This monastery, Wat Tham Phaapuu, had actually been established twenty-three years earlier by a wandering monk called Ajaan Juang. In 1941 a group of northeastern Thammayut missionary monks (Phra Thammajedii, Ariyakhunaathan "Seng", and Phra Phrommunii "Saa" [see later mention] from Wat Noranaat in Bangkok) passed through the area but found nothing of interest to them, just uninhabited forest and caves. Khamdii arrived some fourteen years later after seeking a suitable environment for meditation and decided to settle after obtaining permission from the Jao Khana Jangwat (Khamdii 1988, p. 1). He was then fifty-three years of age and his reputation, which had preceded him, was soon consolidated locally, especially among nearby provincial élite (including the wife of the Chief of the Provincial Treasury, Khlang Jangwat) and then, through these persons, to the capital and Chao, and others, such as Bunyong Soralam, the General Manager of the Railways Authority of Thailand (*Phuuwaakaan rotfai*).

I would like to mention one further example to show the social and spatial interconnections between northeastern forest monks and élite urban patrons. Dr Jim Thippawon, former Julaalongkorn University mathematics teacher (educated in the United States) and tutor of royal children, had been introduced to forest teachers since she was a child. Her father had been a lay follower of Ajaan Man and had introduced her to Man's disciple Ajaan Lii Thammatharo in the 1950s. Before his death, Jim's father asked her to be a *mae chii*, which at that time she had no intention of being. But some years later, in the mid-1970s she eventually decided to leave her husband, family, and career and head off to the northeastern forests. After staying with a number of forest teachers she eventually settled temporarily at Wat Paa Daan Wiwek in Norngkhaai, under the energetic Ajaan Thui.

#### PROPAGANDA, SECURITY, AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The most important single factor responsible for bringing forest monks to



the capital and the capital to the peripheral forests was through the above network of influential personalized relationships. Each of these prominent individuals knew each other and at some time most had jointly participated in ritual involving Man's disciples. This social configuration was facilitated, as mentioned in the previous chapter, by infrastructural developments which had both practical and psychological advantages for central *meuang* Thai. Then there were the many military personnel, mainly the airforce,<sup>23</sup> stationed in sensitive northeastern districts during the 1960s fighting the insurgents (Communist Party of Thailand, CPT). Some of these officers came into contact with monks such as Ajaans Khao, Bua, Chorp, Wan, Orn, Mahaa Bua, and Kongmaa. The first batch of amulet-medallions for Ajaans Fan (1964) and Waen (1971–72) were sponsored by the airforce. The forest monk named Kwaa Sumno (1904–76), Wat Paa Klaangnonphuu (Phannaanikhom district, Sakon Nakhorn), Man's reclusive early pupil who settled late in his life, started to become the focus of attention from high-ranking airforce officers but died before devotion became too intense.

Some forest *samnak* were situated in assumed communist-held areas (*khet siidaeng*, or “red areas”, see the discussion above on Ajaan Baen) where the Tahaan Paa or “forest army” were most active (commencing in the mid-1960s), a point also noted by Keyes (1989, p. 138 n. 18). One monastery (mentioned on page 225) situated in the heart of the Phuuphaan in Norngwuasor district, Udorn, is called Wat Thamsahaaitham (the word *sahaa* came to imply “comrade” and was used by insurgents and students in the maquis as a mode of personal address). It was one of the last significant areas which the military eventually overran in the late 1970s. One of the monastic inmates was a former insurgent, who turned instead to the reclusive monastic life.

The internal security arm of the government attempted to secure the participation of a number of popular wandering forest monks in the Phuuphaan (particularly the provinces of Loei, Udorn, and Sakon Nakhorn) in a counter-ideological and counter-propaganda campaign among isolated villagers. This did not, as far as I could ascertain, find much popular support and the authorities may have been disappointed in the lack of interest among Man's *kammathaan* pupils. However, as the following example shows, it seems that some wandering monks were coerced by monastic seniors who were in turn pressured by secular and ecclesiastical politicized élite. One former pupil of Man, the earlier-mentioned Thongkham Praphaan, related his own personal conflict during this time.



Thongkham, it may be remembered, is a Phuuthai from the isolated Phuuphaan village of Phakkamphuu in Phannaanikhom district, Sakon Nakhorn. He spent many years wandering in this part of the then heavily forested countryside and was well known among some of the local villagers. At one time during the late 1950s he was staying at Wat Paa Sutthaawaat on the outskirts of Sakon Nakhorn town when he was asked to visit a number of small hamlets in his home district and sermonize on the immorality of communism. He declined but was continually encouraged by senior administrative Thammayut monks to go and spread *dhamma* and nationalism as twin concerns in the maquis (this and similar incidents contributed to the government's politicized Thammathuut programme). He reluctantly agreed and many times during the course of his wanderings was threatened by insurgents. Then, through confusion and fear, as well as personal matters (see endnote 8 of Chapter Five) he returned to Wat Paa Sutthaawaat in Sakon Nakhorn and disrobed not long afterwards. Thongkham said he eventually realized that becoming implicated in the government's political propaganda campaign was not the right way for a practising monk. Thongkham is perhaps exceptional in that most forest-dwelling monks in Man's lineage at that time evaded this situation by staying clear of the towns and being implicated in jingoism and ideological confrontation. One forest monk who was not so fortunate, despite apparent disinterest in ideological issues in the latter insurgency period, is the now-legendary former pupil of Ajaan Fan, named Ajaan Huat.

In the late 1970s Huat (Wat Paa Norng Phai, Sakon Nakhorn) was wandering in a "red area" of the Phuuphaan and, although he was earlier warned by insurgents not to pass through, he did and never returned. It had been assumed that Huat and his small band were killed by insurgents. This incident was used to great effect by the military and civil authorities in Sakon Nakhorn, to show the "immorality" of the CPT. The then Governor of Sakon Nakhorn had earlier visited Huat's *samnak* and according to some, the CPT may have thought Huat was an agent for the state. Another source told me that the army had in fact raided a nearby CPT camp after Huat's first encounter with the insurgents during his earlier wanderings, and thus the killings were a revenge. Local stories, possessing colour and verisimilitude, mentioned that in order to "neutralize" Huat and his companions' *saksit* or supernatural powers, the insurgents had the monks tied down and women walk over their heads before they killed them. The media was fast to pick up these local tales of atrocity which for



a while reached a momentous national intensity.

Around the same period, the government's rural development programmes took off and brought many senior government officials from ministries such as Agriculture and Agricultural Co-operatives, Interior, Health and Education into closer contact with forest monks. Some of these well-educated individuals became keen meditators and supporters of forest teachers, maintaining their interests in northeastern forest *samnak* after returning to the capital. Some would organize tours during the long weekends consisting of work friends, or stay at forest monasteries for a week or so for meditation. One early organizer, mentioned in Chapter One, was Mom Luang Jitti Nopphawong, an ardent supporter of Mahaa Bua.

Jitti, it may be recalled, had obtained her material on Man from Mahaa Bua for her *Siisapdaa* weekly magazine (before Mahaa Bua's own biography on Man came out in 1971, printed by the aforementioned Chuan Printing). In her position she was thus significantly responsible for bringing Man and his lineage to attention in the late 1960s. Jitti, related to Wachirayaanawong (not to be confused with the tenth royal Sangkharaat, Wachirayaan), had often visited Wat Bowornniwet, meeting informally and socializing with other Bangkok élite. Jitti was in part responsible for bringing Mahaa Bua and Somdet Yaansangworn (then Phra Sasanasophon) together in the late 1950s when Mahaa Bua used to reside at Wat Bowornniwet during his occasional visits to the capital.

Another important social fact was that many of Wat Bowornniwet's élite patrons had vital business and kin affiliations in provincial centres and would have heard of the local reputation of Man's forest monks through these informal lines. Wat Bowornniwet, as I have shown above, was the meeting point for prominent individuals, the nation's rich and influential, and an ideal venue in which to discuss and nurture mutual interest in meditation<sup>24</sup> and the Thammayut's forest monks.

As well, one critical link between urban élite and forest monks was founded by the earlier-mentioned Lii Thammatharo (1907–61). Lii was responsible for the so-called "Janthaburii line" of the northeastern *kammathaan* tradition and, as he himself claims, was the first monk to bring Man's forest tradition to the attention of the central provinces and the élite as early as the 1950s. Between periods of extensive wandering Lii spent much time in and around the capital and founded his first forest *samnak* in Janthaburii in 1935 (though there is little evidence of Man's tradition in the Eastern Region today). Twenty years later he founded the famous Wat



Asokaaraam, inspired by his visit to Buddhalogical sites in northeast India. Wat Asokaaraam is situated in a mangrove swamp at Samut Prakaan on land donated by a wealthy patron, some 30 kilometres from the capital. Lii was creative and individualistic and widely known for his display of supranormal powers (see Chapter Six) — and while not always approved by Man's other more self-restrained pupils, the potency of which was widely respected.

Now according to some sources, Lii was the first pupil of Man to gain direct access to the royalty through one of his followers, a high-ranking palace attendant of the queen named Thao Sii Sattayaanurak. This person told the queen about her teacher Ajaan Lii and his normative mystical reputation. As mentioned in the last chapter, the queen was, by some accounts, the first to have contact with northeastern forest monks and in turn inspired the king. Thao Sii Sattayaanurak in fact was a somewhat charismatic person herself, which probably accounts for her attraction to someone like Lii. She had learnt meditation from Lii and from time to time used her accrued mind-reading skills on the monks at Wat Bowornniwet, some of whom were rather circumspect about her supranormal powers. Lii, as we saw earlier, had also been close to Tisso (Somdet Mahaawiirawong) at Wat Baromniwaat as well as other high-ranking Thammayut monks at Wat Siimahaathaat, a northeastern (Wat Isaan) monastery patronized by many influential military and civil élite.

#### WAT BOWORNNIWET, FOREST MONKS, AND SECTARIANISM

As shown above, the importance of personalized informal linkages between the royalty and northeastern forest monks needs underlining. Yet, as well, because of historic connections the interest shown by the royal household in forest monks has been integrally connected with Wat Bowornniwet's support for a handful of Man's first-generation pupils. Whatever motives the Thammayut had (at least certain elements in the ecclesia) in supporting wanderers in the lineage of Man, the connections with Wat Bowornniwet — in particular Somdet Yaansangworn — throughout the 1960s remained firm. The personal relationship between Somdet Yaansangworn and Mahaa Bua cemented at Wat Bowornniwet has been documented by Tambiah (1984, pp. 155, 184, 189); though after the 1950s and early 1960s, Mahaa Bua rarely visited Wat Bowornniwet and preferred instead to reside with his friend Somdet Saa (Phra Phrommunii, mentioned earlier) at Wat Noranaat,



a monastery consisting largely of northeastern monks.

According to a close disciple of Mahaa Bua who accompanied the teacher to Bangkok from time to time, Mahaa Bua started to perceive some resentment towards the presence of forest monks by ambitious middle-ranking *pariyat* residents at Wat Bowornniwet. Thus the traditional tensions between “practice” and “theory”, which in any case are never far from the surface, again materialize within the Thammayut’s monastic centre of learning (I shall discuss this further in the next chapter). Mahaa Bua’s senior pupil, the late Ajaan Singthorng, was considered little more than some kind of “magical monk” by the monastery’s *pariyat* inmates and, after this, never again returned to Wat Bowornniwet.

After publishing Man’s biography, relations between Somdet Yaansangworn and Mahaa Bua soured; yet Mahaa Bua continued to go to Wat Bowornniwet to pay respects to Wachirayaanawong up until the latter’s death. The early association between Somdet Yaansangworn and Mahaa Bua was an expression of Somdet’s personal interest in Man’s lineage activated largely by his predecessor. Other factors included the prevailing religio-politics and wide response to the resurgent experiential interest in meditation within conservative metaphysical religion.

Tambiah (1984) links the interest in forest monks by the Thammayut to religio-political motives related to bitter rivalry and sectarian hostilities since the late 1940s. This is indeed an important element and perhaps some idea of the simmering conflict around this time can be appreciated in one incident in 1949 when Wachirayaanawong was Sangkharaat.

In this incident it had been proposed by some senior Mahaanikaai monks with the endorsement of the liberal 1941 Sangha Act (which, as we saw earlier, for the first time permitted separate *nikaai* administrative lines) that the Thammayut come under a single bureaucratic religious structure and hierarchy. Instructions were sent out to the Thammayut Jao Khana Jangwat not to concede to Mahaanikaai demands (Praphat 1964, pp. 550–52). It was the wish of the Mahaanikaai that ecclesiastical ranking in the new structure be based on the number of *phansaa* (as the traditional evaluation of monastic seniority) combined with *pariyat* qualifications. The first two Sangha Prime Ministers (Sangkhaanaayok) were Thammayut, the above-mentioned Tisso in fact was the first appointee and had shown some marked intolerance towards the Mahaanikaai. The third appointee was also to be Thammayut until the Mahaanikaai objected on the grounds that their nominee (Somdet Phra Wannarat “Plot”, Wat Benjamabophit) was better qualified for the



position. A complaint was lodged to the Phiibun government in 1951 and the Sangkharaat, until the decision was eventually overruled. Plot was then offered the position and went on to become the Sangkharaat (*ibid.*, pp. 553–66). This was in fact the second time a Mahaanikaai monk since the Fifth Reign had become Sangkharaat, compared with five previous Thammayut incumbents.<sup>25</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

In this chapter we can thus begin to see a well-defined interlocking paradigm, a network of dialectical relationships in which forest monks were caught in the nexus of energized and politicized lines of patronage. These lines were drawn increasingly tighter in the ensuing discourse between the centre and the periphery, leading inevitably to the domestication of northeastern forest monks.

In the following chapter I focus closer to the complex relationships within and between Thai *nikaai* to forest monks as embedded in the dynamics of contemporary religio-politics.

## NOTES

1. Personal communication with Professor Boon Ketutassa, Department of Comparative Religion, Mahidon University, 1986.

Some observers, including Professor Boon, believe the northeast's charismatic, mystical heritage largely accounts for the recent intensity of interest in ascetic meditation in the *dhutanga* (northeastern *kammathaan*) tradition. Laos certainly seems to have been notable around the time of Man for its magical monks. Some northeastern meditation monks such as Dii Channo, Dii Phathiyo, and Luang Puu Khreung before becoming disciples of Sao and Man had, as we saw earlier, learnt supranormal powers from Lao masters (see Chapter Five). But other regions also have their own mystical traditions.

Tambiah (1984, p. 138) says that the northeastern *dhutanga* tradition "has always carried with it certain tantric associations and charismatic attributes". Tambiah defines "tantric" in this sense from Weber, that is, a "purist virtuoso" who "bearing a cosmic love for people at large" wanted to extend to them "some part of his mystic experience and psychic conquests" (*ibid.*, p. 135).

2. See Tambiah (1978, p. 124) and Keyes (1982, p. 158). A number of studies



will confirm this; see, for instance, Dixon (1977), Lightfoot and Fuller (1984, pp. 85–93), Parnwell (1987), Lim and Porpora (1987, pp. 76–89), and London (1980).

The northeast consists of around 40 per cent of all agricultural households in Thailand. While most families have access to some land and may be classified as small landowners, 70 per cent of these are “poor” or “nearly poor” (Turton 1987, p. 21).

3. Captain James Low commented on the large proportion of monks in Siam during the early nineteenth century, particularly as he perceived this to be an economic burden on the poorer frontier provinces.
4. Undoubtably the most popular *Jataka* in Thailand is the *Vessantara* (no. 547), (known as the Mahaachaata or Phrawet), the story of the Buddha-to-be in his last life before becoming a Buddha. Villagers believe that by listening to this story one accrues great merit (see also Manich [1973, pp. 30–32] and Wells [1975, pp. 283–86]). In the northeast this is normally recited during post-harvest Bun Phrawet festivities; see Tambiah’s early detailed discussion (1970, pp. 160–67).
5. See Burlingame (1969, p. 161). This work is ascribed to Buddhaghosa and supposedly written in Sri Lanka around the middle of the fifth century AC. The legends and folk tales reflect the “spirit of the time” (ibid., pp. 26 ff.).
6. Tales such as these expressing the affinity of monastic and natural environments are to be found in other religious texts. For example, from among the wandering monastics of medieval Europe comes the following tale: “Garan had no monks to serve his cloister, for he journeyed alone ... a savage boar tore saplings from the forest for the building of his cell. Presently other dwellers of the forest came out in curiosity from their hides and dens to see what was going on and stayed to do what they could to keep him company: a fox, a badger and a wolf. Soon, we read, they were for him his ‘monks’ meekly obeying his word as in monastic rule. They were for him his first ‘community’.” (Duckett 1959, p. 41)
7. Personal communication, 1988.
8. Indeed sickness and death from malaria and other illnesses were a constant hazard living in the countryside. Mahaa Bua in a sermon mentioned that whilst staying in a cemetery in Norngkhaai some thirty years ago, the villagers were dying rapidly from an infectious disease and every day the cemetery was full. As related in the sermon, Mahaa Bua overcame the sickness himself through the power of concentration meditation.
9. *Khaathaa* (Pali: *Gatha*) normatively means Pali verses or a four half-line stanza. Some monks told me that its magical associations were purely Thai in origin.



10. These calendrical rituals include the commemoration of the spontaneous assembly of the Buddha's *arahān* disciples, *Maākha-buuchaa*, the commemoration of the birth, enlightenment, and death of the Buddha, *wisaākha-buuchaa*; and the day of entering and the day of leaving the rains retreat, *wankhaophansaa* and *wanorkphansaa*.
11. As a consequence of the traditional marriage and land inheritance pattern, the social configuration in the northeast has been expansionary with the constant movement of individuals between households and villages, and by families between often distant villages. This has tended to create an ongoing situation of fragmentation, acquisition, and extension of agricultural lands, frequently into forest reserve areas.
12. At present in the northeast it is hard to find many large *yaang* trees (Dipterocarpaceae) — tapped for their oil; or large shady trees called *Huu Chaang*, "elephant ear"; *Ton Kung* (*Dipterocarpus-tuberculatus*) — a large deciduous leafy tree; *Tabaek* (*Lagerstroemiaflosreginae*) or *Makhaam* (*Tamarindus Indica*); among others.

In Thailand generally 53–57 per cent of national forest cover still existed in 1961 (Boonchana and Thongchai 1983; Uhlig 1984, 1987). Seventeen years later only 25 per cent existed, while in 1986 around 15–16 per cent forest cover remained (Hirsch n.d.; Hirsch and Lohmann 1989, p. 448). Official figures from the Royal Forestry Department give a grossly over-inflated 29 per cent. Recent data show the seriousness of the problem. At the present rate of deforestation (around 3 per cent per annum) there will be little forest cover left by the end of the century (Hirsch n.d., p. 2). In Nakhorn Raatchasiimaa (Khorat), 27.88 per cent of the total area was covered by forest in 1973, yet nine years later only 9.17 per cent remained (Uhlig 1984).

The Thai Government recently acknowledged this problem after devastating land slides and flooding in the south in November 1988 caused the death of around 400 people and it pushed a bill through Parliament to protect national forests. It remains to be seen how effective this will be. Though not a sudden interest by the government, as Hirsch and Lohmann (1989) remark, general awareness and public pressure on the government over environmental issues has been slowly mounting since the 1970s.

13. O'Connor (1978, p. 141) correctly points out the occasional ambiguity over the word *paa* (see McFarland [1944, p. 521] and Mary Haas [1964, p. 317] for the range of meanings), which may imply anything from an overgrown allotment to dense rain forest.

In contemporary texts relating to monks and monasteries and in a field-work situation the term "Wat Paa ..." did not necessarily imply a residence for



forest monks (a point also made by Georges Condominas in the Lao case, personal communication, 1987). Some village and town monasteries with this prefix to their name, with or without trees and meditating forest monks, may once have been the residence for forest monks, which over a period of time became absorbed in the expansion of human settlement.

Some *dhutanga* monasteries were located in forested areas on the outskirts of Bangkok as recently as twenty to thirty years ago and are now consumed in the urban sprawl. In northeastern *meuang* there are similar examples, Wat Paa Nonniwet (where Man stayed on his return from the north) in Udorn; Wat Paa Sutthaawaat (where Man died) in Sakon Nakhorn; and Wat Paa Saalawan (set up by Man's right-hand pupil, Ajaan Sing) in Khorat. Wat Paa Nonniwet only ten years ago was an extensive cremation ground and a burial site for Chinese, Muslims, and Christians, surrounded by forest. Today there is a primary school, a slaughter house, shops, and a new residential area around the monastery with the new Udorn-to-Nongkhaai main road running past.

In the capital itself growth has been immense over the past few decades; many traditional peri-urban monasteries during the Third and Fourth Reigns are now in the centre of the metropolis. According to O'Connor (1978, p. 145), when his elderly informants spoke of forest surrounding monasteries north of the old city walls, there was no differentiation between peri-urban monasteries and remote forest monasteries.

14. The social and political implications are so complex that until recently few non-governmental organizations were prepared to become actively involved in reforestation in the northeast.
15. Information obtained from a two-week stay at the monastery and a follow-up visit from December to January 1987. Informants included the teacher himself, monastic inmates, villagers, and urban lay devotees.
16. This paradoxical situation whereby ascetics (considered to possess special powers and other personal attributes) continually try to out-distance a fervent laity may be seen among "virtuosi" in most religious traditions (the Sufi, early Franciscans, Hindu Sannyasin, the Hijiri in medieval Japan, and so on). As we are told in a Japanese poem (c. 1000 AC) entitled "Unusual Things" by the famous essayist Lady Seishonagon: "The 'kenza' [ascetic] seems to make great efforts. As he has to climb from mountain to mountain ... in order to practise his austerities, he must have had many fearful experiences. At last, if word should go out that he had a miraculous character and superhuman power by virtue of his trainings, he would be very busy every day and night with his many supporters' invitations to travel here and there. So that he cannot seek a place for peaceful living." (Quoted in Hori [1958, p. 209])



17. Than Somdet was sixth in line of succession at Wat Bowornniwet, and the first commoner to head the Thammayut.
18. Somdet Yaansangworn replaced Somdet Phra Ariyawongsaakatayaan "Waat Waasano" from Wat Raatchabophit who died in 1988. Early in 1989 there was some speculation that as Somdet Waat was also Thammayut, the new incumbent should be Mahaanikaai. However, Somdet Yaansangworn is certainly the king's choice and the most senior Somdet, though the now-aged northeastern Mahaanikaai monk, Phra Phimolatham (deputy Sangkharaat), is by far the most senior in terms of overall *phansaa*, but not in total period in the Somdet rank, the important criterion in this regard. Phimolatham may also have difficulty in distancing himself from his "tainted" past record (on this see Tambiah [1984, pp. 166–67]).

The king had known Somdet Yaansangworn since he himself ordained at Wat Bowornniwet (under Wachirayaanawong) with the Somdet as his personal teacher. The Crown Prince ordained briefly under the Somdet and, more controversially, the Somdet had also ordained the prince's eldest son by his second wife as a novice in December 1987.

19. Noted also by C. Reynolds (personal communication, 1987).
20. Somdet's meditation manual, *Contemplation of the Body* [*Kayanupassana*] (Nyanasamvara, 1974) was based on textual exegesis, translated from a series of talks given to foreign visitors at Wat Bowornniwet in 1971.
21. Informants at Wat Bowornniwet remarked that Wachirayaanawong was a punctilious and "accomplished" exemplary monk. He would not hesitate to reprimand Somdet Yaansangworn (as the king's personal teacher) if the ordained king was late or over an infraction of *vinaya*. Wachirayaanawong was reputedly at times stubbornly individualistic, as, for example, when a luxury motor vehicle was sent to take him to an important outside function, he instead sent his novices in the vehicle, whilst he walked.
22. Including Mahaa Bua's mother, since deceased and a now-famous *mae chii* named Khun Mae kaew, known for her meditative accomplishments and praised by Man himself. Khun Mae Kaew resided in an isolated *samnak* in Kamcha'ii district, Mukdaahaan, up until her death in 1991 at ninety years of age.
23. For some reason it appeared that the airforce officers were closer to forest monks than the army, a point also noted by Professor Chalong Soontravanich, Department of History, Chulalongkorn University (personal communication). Chalong has himself spent many years eagerly reading material on the northeastern forest monk tradition.
24. Interest in meditation may be either normative or non-normative in its goal



orientations. The monastic and lay meditator may be sought out to describe visions and symbols indicative of “chance” or “luck”, as in seeking lottery numbers.

In Theravada countries the significant interest in organized (lay) meditation since the mid-twentieth century among predominantly middle class and élite has been noted by Tambiah (1984, pp. 3, 168) and Kirsch (1977, p. 266) for Thailand; Gombrich (1983, p. 21) for Sri Lanka; King (1964, p. 214) and Mendelson (1975, chaps. 5, 6) for Burma.

Recent data suggests that there is little difference between the numbers of meditators in the capital (3.3 per cent) and in the provincial *meuang* (2.7 per cent). Overall, few people in Thai society actually meditate, according to this survey covering some 20,000 households across the country (*Folk Doctor Magazine* 102 [year 9; 1987]; the survey was carried out by Special Colonel Thorngkham Siiyothin).

25. See Ishii (1986, pp. 107–13) for a full transcription of the relevant correspondence.



## CHAPTER NINE

### *Merit Power and Institutionalization*

Living in the forest, the mind becomes confident. Dhamma which you have studied — or even which you haven't studied will make itself clear, because nature is the teacher ... When I realised this, I no longer worried about studying the scriptures and I was reminded of the Lord Buddha and his disciples: They studied and learned from the principles of nature. None of them followed a textbook ... For these reasons I'm willing to be ignorant when it comes to texts ... Some kind of trees sleep at night and are awake during the day; others sleep by day and are awake by night. (Ajaan Lii Thammatharo n.d. [a], p. 9)

In Thailand, the 1960s and early 1970s were a period of growing insecurity and ruthless political management, eventually culminating in the 1976 coup. In the northeast, as Dixon (1977) noted, the First and Second National Five-Year Plans (1961–71) reflected the central government's concern over security in these outlying provinces, as well as the need to increase its popularity in this region.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the intensity and extent of rural developments with the imposition of centralized values seared lines across the far provinces, terminating in the now-exposed northeastern forests. This in turn facilitated access from the provincial *meuang* and, beyond this, to the capital and the nation's rich and powerful with the king at the apex. I also looked at the traditional affiliation between the royalty and the Thammayut as a conjoining element which brought the royalty into contact with the northeastern forest monks situated in the taboo-loaded periphery.

The Thammayut's élitist (and assumed imperialist) connections sourced



in the heart of the nation-state were not without problems in neighbouring Laos, the co-residence of Man's wandering pupils. Here the Thammayut were considered linked to subversive activities (Lafont 1982), such that by the mid-1970s, a number of Man's wandering pupils never went back across the Maekhong, instead settling in northeastern Thai forests. In Laos the Thammayut were, as in Thailand, largely affiliated with the traditional Lao élite including the last king and his family and were discredited to the point of disappearance from social life by the revolutionary movement (all monks now come under the one monastic fraternity in the state-controlled *sangha*).

Neighbouring Kampuchea has also had long associations between the Thammayut and national élite (Ebihara 1966, pp. 175–96). In Mongkut's reign, two Kampuchean princes, the future kings Norodom and Sisowat, were ordained at Wat Bowornniwet, whence a mission was apparently first sent at the entreaty of King Ang-Duong in 1854 to set up the reform *nikaai* in that country (Lingat 1933, p. 93).<sup>1</sup> The Thammayut, though pro-Siamese in Kampuchea, were staunchly apolitical compared with the Mahaanikaai (Osborne 1979, pp. 71, 87–88; Brodrick n.d., p. 114). With the Khmer revolutionary movement's intent to create a national homogeneous "people's" *sangha*, the Thammayut were subsequently disbanded (Vickery 1986, p. 162).

On the Thai scene, political instability on the Lao and Kampuchean borders from the late 1960s to the early 1970s may have been a contributing factor for the sudden interest by the state in the social field of the northeastern forest monk. During this period Tambiah (1984) noted a dire need for the tapping of individuated charisma in the northeastern forests as a means of propping up existing authority structures.<sup>2</sup> The conveyance of authority (bureaucratic power) is based on a polyphony of accrued merit, aggregated and circumstantial fortune (*waasanaa*) and recognized personal skills (largely, though not wholly, derived from past action). The legitimate justification for action through positions of power has to be morally supported by the forest monks' personal charisma and assumed *saksit* (sacred and empowered person or object) vigour as other-worldly powers accorded to "special persons". Indeed, strategic interests in positions of secular power need to maintain equilibrium or homeostasis, as well as psychological self-confidence in an increasingly vicissitudinous, unstable, and impersonal modern world. These secular bases (I shall give specific case-studies below) may draw on the cumulative virtues and merit powers (*dechabun*) of forest monks to support their privileged positions in an increasingly fissile and fragmented society



(little resembling the simplistic *naai-phrai* traditional typology of Siamese society which Akin [1969] has outlined).

But is this social phenomenon connected with the political centre losing its power? O'Connor (1980, p. 36) argues that in recent times it has become considerably enervated, though Tambiah (1984, p. 345) suggests this has not happened despite the centre losing its "self-confidence". However, both writers agree that the centre of power needs psychological endorsement and assentation from external *saksit* sources, the "merit of the holy men" situated in the peripheral forests. In Tambiah's (1984, p. 77) words, there is a need to "recharge and fortify monarchical legitimacy and creative powers", and for the personal advancement of "established political and financial élites and interest groups" (ibid., p. 185). But sources of pure charismatic leadership were not only to be found at the fringe of human habitation, in the forests. As we saw in Chapter Seven, new middle class (including technocrats and professionals) also turned inwards, redefining and moulding religious experiences in the matrix of responses to modernity.

But perhaps one rationale behind the resurgence of interest in the ascetic peripheral-dwelling monks lies in the domestic and "external political circumstances ... that have eroded and put into question the legitimacy of the ruling elements and privileged sectors of the society" (Tambiah 1984, p. 345). This in fact follows O'Connor (1978), who remarks that the conjoining of sanctity and the centre seems to be breaking down, thus creating an interest by the national élite in the "magical sanctity" of the forest monks; a localized ideal type of sanctity founded on a separation from secular urban power bases. Historically, Siamese society emerged from the cosmological conjoining of sanctity and *meuang* (the palace and its surroundings) and today, as in times past, the certitude and normality of that legitimating merger is placed under considerable stress.

Besides an apparent "crisis of power", I also mentioned in Chapter Seven that with the rapid expansion of a middle class and its *nouveau-riches* and increased participation in the political quasi-democratic process, the patronage and support of institutional forest monks was a means of legitimating positions of secular power in the ritual display of merit-making. As we saw, during the 1960s there was a rapid growth of domestic capital (circulated within the metropole and certain strategic groups linked to provincial *meuang*) and for some, rapid social change. Henceforth, traditional conceptions of power and moral order as embedded in the early Siamese cosmological treatise, the *Traiphuum* (C. Reynolds 1976; Coedes 1957)



needed to be reconstituted in line with changing circumstances.

Mulder remarks that in recent times the “quantity of available power became larger and its sources diversified” until the experience of power moved rapidly outside of the “realm of domesticated, amoral *saksit* power with which one could accommodate on the basis of personal contracts” (1985, p. 50). Then,

moving toward the more impersonal, unpredictable side of power that is self-seeking ... such as the power of political advantage, the power of money, and the blind forces of technological expansion, materialism, and capital accumulation.

Merit-making was a means of converting this new-found wealth into status, with the king as matrix and traditional élite as ideal type and orthopraxy. The invigorated interest in forest monks may be seen as buying prestige through the traditional means of proffering supports (within the symmetrical ritual of merit-making) to the nation’s virtuosi.

Besides any apparent religio-political motives linking forest monks to the centre of power and changing circumstances, élite interest may be partly a response to emanations from the nation’s periphery. This may be seen in terms of discourse transmission from an oral genesis to textual authority (the latter depending on the cogent pastoral source of the former) and the proliferation of forest monk hagiographies from the late 1960s onwards. This was an effective means of bringing forest monks onto the central social and political stage, and with élite support providing formal credence and legitimation.

Some of these increasingly politicized forest monks were widely believed to be self-accomplished *arahān* having lived and attained the universal ideals. They were thus considered eminently worthy of veneration from the king — as supreme patron of the *sangha* — down to the common people (see also Keyes [1982, p. 159]).<sup>3</sup> The forest monks, although faithful reproductions of universal tradition on the one hand, are, on the other, localized in a country which places the living *arahān* at the very pinnacle of its belief system (Tambiah 1987*a*, p. 112). Man embodies both particular and universal imagery, being in the same line as the Buddha’s *arahān*, contextually sited, as noted earlier, in the places of his wanderings — the nation’s periphery.<sup>4</sup>

As acclaimed virtuosi, forest monks by the very nature of their chosen vocation are essentially apolitical or even anti-political (following Weber’s



[1970, p. 337] related argument; see also Tambiah [1984, p. 190]). Indeed, the path to achieving "sainthood" entails abstention from secular concerns, following a mode of existence radically incompatible with active involvement in politics (Leach 1973, p. 52).<sup>5</sup> Forest monks were never the "foci for political movements" (Keyes 1989, p. 133), their life ways were oriented towards cloistered pupillages and individualized practice (though strictly defined by normative parameters), sublimation and elevation of the practitioner through cultivation of the mind (*phaawanaa*).<sup>6</sup>

Though essentially disinterested in worldly matters in their quest for individual salvation, forest monks are in another sense still "in the world" and, until the mystical path itself has been realized to fruition, liable to be swayed and induced in modifying their life ways through the outpouring of oblatinal fervour (see also the discussion in Chapter Seven). Eventually, also, "brokers and mediators between the periphery and centre" emerge from among forest monks and the "doors are open to the inflection, and intrusion of, the interests of the larger context in which the *sangha* is embedded" (Tambiah 1984, p. 190). The tendency to spoil is never far away as history (both modern and pre-modern) is replete with particular individuals who became intent on worldly gain and personal power supported by powerful secular patrons.

Forest monks told me that they were aware of the above problem through entanglement with the wider social milieu and consciously tried to maintain distance, though with varying success. Man's pupils in the post-reform period were on occasions used by the Thammayut, as noted in Chapters Four and Five as roving missionaries in the peripheral provinces, and even Man on occasions was preoccupied with teaching doctrinal Buddhism (at its most intensely practical) to individuals and small groups of villagers. For example, in 1926 Man and a group of seventy pupils met at Thaa-uthen district in Nakhorn Phanom to discuss how and to what extent they should become involved teaching villagers in Ubon during the course of their wanderings (Yaanasiri et al. 1977, p. 44). Ubon, as we saw earlier, was the focal point for the push into the northeast by national reformers. In this instance it seems that Ubon was selected by Man's band due to either administrative direction or simply out of political expediency and the need to maintain good relations with the ecclesia (Man was careful in this regard).

But to what extent were the wandering forest monks embroiled in sectarian concerns and in "stretching the short, tight, skin of the nation" (Anderson 1983, p. 82) over the outer territories of the Thai nation-state?



As I have shown in earlier chapters, in looking at this question it is necessary to bear in mind the formation of Man's *kammathaan* lineage and corresponding developments in the Thammayut, in the ambit of expansive national reforms (the two factors cannot be entirely separated). The dialectical tension for forest monks concerned, on the one hand, coalescence and regulation by the state (through the Thammayut-tikaa); and, on the other hand, the extent to which (under these conditions) forest monks could maintain their quasi-domiciled, eremitic life ways. The two contrapositions were, and never will be, fully resolved and had a mixed response from forest monks themselves.

Again, one should bear in mind the lingering hostilities between “book learning” and “meditation practice”<sup>7</sup> — the latter at its most radical form in the *dhutanga*, and the corresponding notions of institutional structure and anti-structure (on the fringe of social order). This ensured a continuative distance between forest dwelling and wider social and religio-political concerns (but here I do not imply the predominance of persistence over change). Many informants spoke of the period around Man's time when forest monks were openly mocked by *pariyat* colleagues when delivering a sermon (we saw in Chapter Five how Tisso considered Man without formal Pali and *dhamma* studies as being “unqualified” to teach monks and the laity) and *patibat* monks who likewise saw their scholastic brethren as inutile. I was told by one forest teacher that scholar-monks are like the spoon in the soup, never able to taste the real flavour of the Buddha's *dhamma*. As another forest monk told me, although he felt that *pariyat* monks (of either *nikaai*) regard the “true doctrine” (*sathatham*) in earnest they tend to concern themselves too much with hermeneutics, building discursive structures around them. Forest monks, on the other hand, experientially and intuitively perceive the doctrine and its transmission holistically, and the teachings as an essentially pragmatic and workable entity.

However, in this doctrinal schema, *pariyat* monks with whom I spoke do not discard the need for meditation practice but see three distinct levels; “theory” at the base, followed by “practice”, leading finally to “penetration” (*patiwet*) into the Buddha's *dhamma*. *Pariyat* monks said that the real practitioner has to start with a basic frame of reference in studying the scriptures; forest monks without this basic referent cannot realize anything other than their own delusion. In response, forest monks would retort that they learn their theory at the ordination catechism when they are given the “five meditation themes” (namely, the hair on the head, body hair, nails, teeth,



and skin). This is all the learning that is necessary, according to Man (1984, pp. 75–78).

There were also monks who were shades in between theory and practice, as we saw earlier, practitioners who had been Pali scholars and as recluse wanderers continued to maintain particular interests with the secular and religious establishment. One informant in Ubon told me that during Man's time there were many missionary Thammayut monks in the northeast who taught *dhamma* in both modes (theory and practice), though many eventually could not compromise and were drawn into, or consciously chose, one vocation over another.

#### SOCIAL AND POLITICAL DISCOURSE, POWER RELATIONS, AND FOREST MONKS: THREE CASE-STUDIES

Despite their close proximity to the establishment, it is rarely *pariyat* monks (clerical educators, scholars, and administrators) but forest dwellers who are fervently sought after to secure and buttress secular power bases. In the following case-studies I show the intertexture of social and personal relations between northeastern forest monks and three important influential contemporary figures (representing the military, politics, and business) and the impact on the social field of isolated *samnak*. These are firstly, at the time of writing, the army Commander-in-Chief General Chawalit Yongjaiyoet (who, some observers believe, is seeking legitimation for his political ambitions);<sup>8</sup> secondly, Wiira Musikapong (an outspoken former deputy minister in Prem's government, struggling to re-establish his basis of authority after his brief internment); and thirdly, Chalieu Yuuwithayaa (wealthy self-made entrepreneur needing to cement his personal stock of merit-power).

General Chawalit and his wife, Khunying Lui, have over the past few years been supporting a relatively little-known but rising (in popular luminosity) second-generation monk in Man's lineage named Ajaan Sa-aat (former pupil of Ajaans Thet and Wiriayang). Sa-aat's *samnak* (Wat Paa Dornhaaisak) is situated in an isolated and economically depressed part of Norng Haan district, some 30 kilometres from the provincial town of Udonthani.

About two or three times a year the army boss and his entourage stir up the dusty back roads to visit the forest teacher (the monastery also has a resident *mae chii* named Suphattraa, gaining recognition locally for her *aphinihaan* and increasing proximity to Sa-aat). Chawalit had earlier been involved in fund-raising towards the *samnak*'s lavish *saalaa*. During these



visits, organized with the precision of a military exercise, the reverberations can be felt over the countryside to the heart of the provincial centre. During the 1988 *kathin* celebrations organized by Chawalit, every provincial government servant in the *meuang* (with an estimated hundred plus agencies) was compelled to “make merit” at the suggestion of the provincial governor towards this monastery. The total contributions were 134,200 baht (US\$5,161) and, from other contributing sources, 303,000 baht (US\$11,653). Donations were then passed on to Chawalit’s aides by the governor as personal assistants and departmental heads attempt to outshine each other in the subtle interplay of social manoeuvres. As we can see, the implications of Chawalit’s patronage to Ajaan Sa-aat are manifold and far-reaching.

In the second case-study, in the backwaters of Loei province, the outspoken Member of Parliament Wiira Musikapong sought out a youthful charismatic second-generation pupil from Man, Ajaan Montrii Khanasophano. In 1987 Wiira was held on a “lese-majesty” charge after an election campaign in the south and pressured to resign. He was given a four-year sentence in June 1988 after a long drawn-out affair, though released a month later in a royal amnesty for right-leaning political offenders. Nevertheless, Wiira was noticeably shaken by the experience and made a public announcement to avoid in future any disparaging comments pertaining to the royalty. During the period leading up to his predicament Wiira would sometimes visit Montrii at Wat Tham Phaabing at Wangsaphung district south of Meuang Loei.

Montrii first came to Wat Tham Phaabing in 1969 and took over as monastic head and teacher only four years later at the age of twenty-one. He is a pupil and nephew of the earlier-mentioned late Ajaan Lui Janthasaaro, who had been an independent forest monk until, in his old age, becoming dependent on the metropolitan *samnak* connection (see previous chapter).

Lui founded the monastery in 1966 and it consists of a small isolated mountainous outcrop where Man and Sao first stayed in 1911, and again seven years later in 1918 when the first *samnak* became established. This was reputed to be one of Man’s favourite places for meditation, isolated and with plenty of shelter from the elements. Fifty years later the forest was virtually cleared by villagers seeking suitable land for planting cotton. When Lui arrived in 1966 he had to replant many trees around the 26 hectare mountainous *samnak*.

Montrii, who said he was dying of an incurable liver disease (this was a



reason given for him wanting to teach as much as he could to an interested audience), was ordained in his home town of nearby Wangsaphung. As a novice he had followed such respected northeastern *kammathaan* teachers as Ajaans Thet, Orn, Fan, and Suphat before settling back to run the monastery and look after his uncle, Lui. Montrii had received only two years of elementary education but said in any case formal education was not important (even something of a hindrance; see, for instance, Ajaans Chaa and Thui's comments in Chapter Seven) for a true practitioner and disciple of the Buddha. In recent years his relationship with urban supporters has been growing — though he seems to remain fairly selective over his followers, especially resident monastic inmates. At the time of my visit (out of *phansaa*), there were four monks, one novice, and five *mae chii* at the monastery.

In the past five years Montrii said that many political élite had visited him with the intention, as he put it, to “make merit” (*tham bun*). This, he said, was symptomatic of the recent sense of “confusion” (*sabson*), uncertainty, purposelessness, and senseless materiality among the nation's rich and powerful. While not suggesting this was directly indicative of a “political crisis” (in Tambiah's sense) he nevertheless alluded to social demoralization among the nation's wealthy and influential, and individual *kammic* responses. In reply to my question why did prominent individuals come to visit him and not monks closer to home, he likened this to wanting to buy special food which cannot be bought locally at a particular restaurant which may be situated some distance away.

At the time of my visit, Montrii, and two other well-known forest-dwelling pupils of Man resident in Loei, Ajaans Siithorn Siilathano and Thorn Yaanatharo, had received anonymous letters distributed among a list of well-known northeastern forest monks passed through the Supreme Ecclesiastical Council (Mahaatherasaamakhom). Though Montrii was reluctant to comment, the letter (sent from either individuals or factions within the *sangha*, political, or national security interests) apparently cautioned them over the formation of large followings (which they in any case have little or no control over) and in the tone of teaching prominent political figures. Montrii said that he and other practitioners are not concerned with political issues, but only in teaching the Buddha's *dhamma*. He explained it framed within normative cosmology and doctrinal conceptions of the “Noble Truths” (*ariyasat*) on “suffering” (*thuk*) and the means (*withii*) to achieve peaceful existence. The dispensation or tone of his teaching whilst essentially



the same content for semi-literate villagers or Western-educated élite, is modified only in its mode of presentation through the use of allegories, idioms, and the like, either in Central Thai or Lao with contextual shifts from one world-view (the village) to another (the *meuang* and beyond).

In the third case-study, Chalieu Yuuwithayaa rose from a travelling salesman of local medicines and medical equipment to one of the nation's most powerful *nouveau-riche*. Chalieu owns the famous *krathingdaeng* tonic drink popular among the working class and T.C. Pharmaceuticals, one of Thailand's largest medicine manufacturers. More recently, Chalieu has bought into lucrative metropolitan real estate and donated millions of baht to the army's widely publicized "Green Isaan Project". As well, Chalieu has contributed huge amounts of money into religious investment, in particular to his home region and monks in the lineage of Ajaan Man.<sup>9</sup> The late Ajaan Wan Uttamo at Wat Tham Aphaidamrongtham (Sorngdao district, Sakon Nakhorn) was one such monk to receive attention from Chalieu in the 1970s.

Wan was born at Baan Thaankon, Sawaang Daendin district, Sakon Nakhorn, his family well-off farmers originally from Ubon. Wan was one of five brothers, a bright student at primary school and ordained at fifteen years of age. At his later *bhikkhu* ordination his *upatchaa* was Phra Thammajedii "Mahaa Juum" and for the early part of his monastic life followed Ajaan Sao until the latter's death in 1942, when Wan was staying at Wat Paa Sutthaawaat in Sakon Nakhorn (the monastery where Man died). At this time he was still interested in academic pursuits and passed with distinction his *nak tham* examinations. He then decided once and for all to leave "book learning", declining offers of administrative positions at new Thammayut monasteries and going off to the forests to seek Man (*Anusorn-ngaan Phra-raatchathaan-phloengsop Phra Udomsang-worawisutthithera* [Funeral ceremony offered by the king to Phra Udomsang-worawisutthithera (Phra Ajaan Wan Uttamo)], 1981). Wan settled at Wat Tham Aphaidamrongtham (well known for its caves) in the late 1960s, a secluded monastery (see also mention in Chapters Seven and Eight) situated some 30 kilometres off the main Udorn to Sakon Nakhorn Road. During the time of my visit pre-*phansaa*, there were fifteen monks, ten novices, and six resident *mae chii*<sup>10</sup> at the three *samnak*.

As mentioned in Chapter Six, Chalieu donated much of 6 million baht towards Wan's magnificent *jedii*, the paramount means of merit-making for the nation's wealthy.<sup>11</sup> Chalieu was closely associated with the afore-



mentioned Dr Chao na Siilawan, who happened to be president of Wan's foundation (according to one reliable source with a floating capital of 10 million baht [US\$384,615]).

#### PERIPHERY AND NATIONHOOD; THE "ROUTINIZATION" OF FOREST MONKS

At the periphery of Thai and Lao polities, the northeast has long remained distant from its shifting administrative centres of power. Indeed, its history has been colourful, influenced in its locale by Khmer civilization, Sukhothai and Ayutthayaa, and in the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries Burmese political ambitions, fragmentation, then integration into the Wiengjan kingdom and finally modern Thailand (Keyes 1967*a*, pp. 4–13; Tambiah 1970, pp. 29–31). In its frontier position to the Lao and Siamese courts it has been caught in seething hostilities which affected social life at all levels. The local *sangha* suffered from the devastation of warfare during Jao Anou's ventures in the early nineteenth century. After a number of years of incessant fighting, the monks and nuns "suffered the same misery as the laity" (Pruess 1976*b*, p. 69). The death of Jao Anou in 1829 marked the end of a powerful independent Lao kingdom which encompassed much of the present-day Northeastern Region and saw the forced movement of "hundreds and thousands of Lao people to Siam, the very same people which today forms the bulk of the inhabitants of Thailand" (Viravong 1964, p. 135).

The relative isolation and remoteness of the northeast contributed to its reputation over the years as a region of potential unrest and revolutionary fervour (Tambiah 1978, p. 124). Relatedly, the dispersed monastic centres and pupillary networks of forest teachers could be conceived by the central élite within this backdrop as an "alternative" system of charismatic influence and challenge to the establishment's national political aspirations (Tambiah 1984, p. 334). But as we saw earlier, this has not been the case as forest monks were incorporated through the routinization process into the heart of Siamese institutions. Indeed, as Tambiah (1984, p. 185) admits, the networks of forest monasteries were not considered to be "politically problematic". As I have shown, the process of structural reintegration and domestication of northeastern forest monks in Man's lineage was carried out effectively through the extension of reform Buddhism by the Thammayut.

Through formal associations with the Thammayut and lay élite (bureaucratic power) — yet on the rim of patterned social forms (because of their



life ways and definitive ritual boundaries which largely preclude a great deal of interaction with the laity) — Man's lineage has been seen more as a buttress to Siamese conservative-traditionalism in Thailand's ethnic-Lao provinces. From another angle, patronage and support proffered through bureaucratic and entrepreneurial élite since the 1960s would have politically muted or negated any likely discordant regional sentiments (I shall return to this when discussing "merit-making" below).

Charismatic individuals, whether millennial, revolutionary, or religious leaders, are diametrically opposed to rational authority (bureaucratic institutions or "institutional permanency" [Weber 1968, p. 21]). When charismatic forest teachers eventually die and lineages disperse, pupils hive off to form new alignments (what I mentioned as a "social crisis" in Chapter Seven). The situation is thus inherently and potentially unstable for forest monks (wandering without a pupillary affiliation) and the parent *samnak*, until such time as the monastery becomes completely domesticated (though this gradual weakening of individuated charisma takes place even before the ailing teacher dies). This routinization occurs when the bureaucratic religious institution takes control over the functioning and direction of the monastery as one more communally imbricating and socially structured (in terms of monk-lay interaction). We thus see untamed charisma (individuated, circumfused), by its very nature unstable yet potentially creative, become thoroughly socialized. It is therefore not hard to see how Man was gradually transformed from an untamed, raw virtuoso to an exemplar of national soteriological ideals and a model for the domesticated *sangha*. The routinized linking of the periphery to the capital and the issuance of royal monastic ranks together with élite patronage are factors which neutralized and regulated forest monks (potential anti-structure) from a peripatetic segmentary phase to formal introcession and incorporation into the nation-wide *sangha* (and to institutionalized charisma).

Keyes (1977*b*) has shown how a charismatic monk in the south with a large local following (perceived as politically troublesome) was eventually neutralized through institutional incorporation and official recognition. I believe this may also have been a function of the state's recognition of Man's extensive lineage. It may be remembered that Man was formally ordained in the Thammayut, then in a liminal phase went off by himself to the wilds and towards the end of his life — though he died as he lived on the rim of institutional forms — was nationally recognized as exemplary and orthodox. The effort to channel free-floating charisma (as in the case of *phuumiibun*)



into established institutions — in this case the Greater Thai Sangha — has successfully reduced the mobility and disjunction of monks with regional followings (ibid., p. 29; though here Keyes had in mind millennial leaders).

### MERIT, RITUAL POWER, AND THE PROCESS OF DOMESTICATION

An effective means of domesticating wandering monks, to which I now turn, was through “merit-making”, a hierarchic but symmetrical ritual with a two-fold function; firstly, as embedded in the socialized interpretation of normative doctrine — a bifocal conception of securing present accomplishments and, perhaps more significant for most believers, enhancing future prospects (Tambiah 1968, pp. 49–52); secondly, an effective means by which the state (in this sense particularly the nation’s élite bureaucrats) can control or regulate free-floating charisma. Until it is routinized, individuated *saksit* power is potentially dangerous (yet perhaps creatively vital) to established institutions and belief systems.

Merit-making in general is an “encompassing concept” (Tambiah 1976, p. 485 n.) closely related to the notion of “power” (*amnaat, khaengraeng*) and its efficacy, embedded in “mutuality, hierarchy, and tension” (ibid., pp. 484–85). It would thus follow that in order for the nation’s political élite to maintain equilibrium they must “fulfill traditional expectations” by patronizing the *sangha* — and in particular with select *saksit* monks — through public and private merit-making (ibid., p. 487). Therefore it may be argued that in the overall hierarchy and social order, merit-making rituals have a “direct political significance” (Brand 1975). As noted earlier, well-organized merit-making tours to the far provinces in search of monks in the lineage of Ajaan Man facilitated the integration of isolated *samnak* into domesticated formal state institutions.

The reasons given to me by urban devotees for participating in collective merit-making related essentially to wanting to give out of “faith” to monks who had persevered in their personal quest for the liberating norm. One large tour which I met during field-work in Roi Et province in 1986 said they were visiting northeastern forest *samnak* to give “robes” (implying making prestations in its widest possible connotation) as too much had been given to Bangkok monasteries in the past and that they no longer needed material supports. Yet another tour (middle-ranking public servants from Bangkok) said it was an opportunity not only for collective enjoyment (*sanuk*) over



the two days of their outing,<sup>12</sup> but simultaneously a visit to “pay respects” (*namatsakaan*) to famous forest monks, some for the first time, whom they had heard and read so much about.<sup>13</sup> These merit-makers were more specific about whom they wanted to support, travelling a great distance coming to see these forest teachers — in some cases, year after year — with prestations in the internal logic of merit. In all cases the performance (both emotional and instrumental; see Wijeyewardene [1986, pp. 42, 244–45]) of ritualized merit-making ensures the devotee’s access to *saksit* merit-powers inherent in the person or object(s) venerated, “a force which is believed to effect favourable benefits for the devotee” (Pruess 1976a, p. 172).

Those presenting offerings to forest monks link merit to notions of discipline and practice, conceptions of moral purity (in meditation and keeping the monks’ precepts or “training rules”, *sikkhaabot*). Merit-makers who were selective considered themselves to be accumulating more merit,<sup>14</sup> which in turn indicates “discriminating wisdom” (and with circular semantics thus permits the merit-maker to differentiate the more “meritorious monks” from the “not-so-meritorious”).

Although seemingly selective in terms of ritual merit-making, informants were not selective when it came to *nikaai* and forest monasteries; as the founder of the EGAT’s Buddhist Association remarked, it is of “no concern”. As we saw in Chapter Five, the vast majority of Man’s pupils were in any case Thammayut and the far northern provinces of the Northeastern Region by and large consisted mainly of Thammayut forest monasteries. However, in the case of the Mahaanikaai’s Ajaan Chaa, there is one branch monastery in Loei, two in Sakon Nakhorn, and one in Norngkhaai — neither with any senior monks. As well, the late Mahaanikaai monk Ajaan Kinnarii has a *samnak* in Nakhorn Phanom at the time of writing headed by an Ajaan Chaa disciple (mentioned later). Charisma, and the reputation and personal attributes of the teacher were the reasons given for visiting selected forest teachers. This intersects with lineage affiliation to Man and, as mentioned earlier, any prior association with the master (even a brief encounter) was sufficient for monks claiming pupillage (and important in enabling them to be recognized by followers) to accrue national prestige.

Since early times forest monks have been regarded as a highly “meritorious field” (*naabun*) (C. Reynolds 1972, p. 8) and actively sought by an eager laity (though historically we know little of the responses to merit-making from the rural masses). Merit-making tours are usually organized by a prominent supporter of forest monks, or through religious associations at the



workplace. After an itinerary is worked out, the tour will normally include an overnight stay at forest monasteries where short-term accommodation is possible (these become like pilgrimage centres, and often regular supporters will arrange for the construction of modern conveniences — though as we have seen, this was not always permitted by the teacher) or an overnight stay at a large provincial hotel. Tours normally are from two to four days' duration, perhaps over weekends (leaving on Friday night) or public holidays. Today most forest monasteries are little more than eight to ten hours' travelling from the capital on mostly sealed roads. Arrangements usually have to be made with the monastery for peak periods of normative rituals (especially *Thort Kathin*) to avoid clash with other merit-making groups. One extensive tour group organized by *Lokthip* publication (a popular periodical with regular features on forest monks) consisted of five days by minibus to the northeast, taking in fourteen well-known forest monasteries in Udorn, Norngkhaai, and Loei provinces. The tour organizers promised participants ample opportunity for making prestations to monks (*tawaai phaapaa*).<sup>15</sup>

#### OBLATIONS AND THE RITUAL OF OFFERING ROBES

The ritual of offering robes (or more correctly, "white cloth", which Mongkut had encouraged during *kathin*) at the end of the rains retreat provides the main opportunity for merit-making. This period is known as "leaving the rains retreat" (*ork-phansaa*), and takes place between the full moons of October and November, officially finishing after the *paatimok* and a short *pavarana* chant, where monks request admonishment for any infringement of discipline during the rains retreat period. The Northeastern Region around this time becomes a hive of activity with many Bangkok and provincial urban devotees criss-crossing the countryside visiting forest monasteries affiliated to Man's first-generation disciples.

The meaning and intention of *kathin* has been interpreted liberally (even in Wachirayaan's time [1983, pp. 7, 93]) where individual and collective generosity and devotion are at their fullest. The *kathin* ceremony requires at least five or more monks, one (though I found at some monasteries, two monks) appointed to receive the offerings of cloth (see *Winaimuk*, vol. 3). In fact robes or cloth may be offered at any time with an informal *phaapaa* or at a specific mortuary ceremony (*bangsukun anitjang*), where cloth is left in the *saalaa* for the monks who will give a short chant based on "impermanence" (*anitjataa*). The term *bangsukun* (Pali: *pamsukula*, see endnote 10)



implies robes made from discarded rags, a *dhutanga* practice which Man followed most of his life (Man's rag-robes may be seen at his "relic museum" in Sakon Nakhorn). In his autobiography, Ajaan Lii (n.d. [b], p. 21) describes an experience on alms-round one morning with Ajaan Man which shows the master's intent in following the ascetic practice of making use of discarded cloth. Following behind, he noticed the master came across a worn-out pair of policeman's trousers, thrown away by the side of the road. Then Man

began to kick the trousers along, back and forth — I was thinking all along that I had to keep my thoughts on the path I was following. Finally, when he reached the fence around the Police Station, he stooped down, picked up the trousers and fastened them under his robes.

Lii went on to say that at the time he was puzzled as to what Man intended to do with such "trash". However, several days later, the old trousers had been made into a shoulder bag and a monk's belt which he gave to Lii to use. "I took them and looked at them. They were nothing but stitches and patches". Lii was rather bemused as to why "with all the good things available" Man had to give him this "sort of thing" (ibid., p. 22). So it was with robes, which Man would make from discarded rags gathered up during his wanderings (one of the classical *nissaya* specified in the *Vinaya*).<sup>16</sup> Knowing Man's practice, lay donations of rags were sometimes left hanging on branches of trees in the master's path.

Though the wandering regimen is less common these days, the tradition of leaving cloth in this manner is still practised within the confines of a number of northeastern forest monasteries, the traditional *phaapaa* or *phaabangsukun* (seen by the laity as less meritorious than the more direct, formalized ritual offering of *kathin* cloth).<sup>17</sup> The preference of some forest monks in receiving cloth in this manner is to maintain the most simplified and pristine mode of lay ritual interaction which they feel accords with the "ancient monks' tradition". One forest monk even told me that he had decided to discourage formal *thort kathin* at his monastery because it was becoming too elaborate with too much attention (competing merit-makers trying to outdo each other in oblatinal fervour) to the point where the original basic intention and purpose of the Buddha's *kathin* had become redundant. This attitude perhaps typifies reformist monks consciously intent on connecting directly to the heart of doctrinal tradition. In this particular case, the forest teacher had a stated preference for small *phaapaa* group offerings more attuned to what he sees as proper "*dhamma* rituals" (*phithii-tham*).



In fact more often there is little noticeable difference between *thort kathin* and *thort phaapaa*, except that the former is more formalized and happens only on one day fixed by the monastery after the rains retreat each year; the latter (as noted above) an excuse to give at any other time (see also Anuman [1986, p. 82]). It should be remembered that in the canonical tradition there are very few normative monastic ceremonies involving the laity, and the universal *kathin* ritual is perhaps the most important in the Buddhist calendar.

In their preference for the more simplified, primitive mode of offering new cloth at the end of the rains, forest monks usually cite the authority of the lineage teacher, saying that it was what Man himself practised and encouraged among his pupils. Yet in reality it is not easy to control lay munificence and enthusiasm for participating in the *kathin* as we shall see below in the case of Wat Paa Baan Taat, where, as with many of the more famous forest monasteries, merit-making groups from the metropole may book up to two years ahead to organize the *kathin*.

During the 1988 *kathin* held on the 30 October, donations received from the ceremony at Mahaa Bua's Wat Paa Baan Taat were around 860,000 baht (US\$33,076), which is about a thousand times more than the average northeastern village monastery. The ceremony was organized by a prominent lay devotee mentioned in Chapter Seven, Dr Amaraa Amilaa. Although Amaraa's relatives and friends organized the *kathin* this did not exclude local villagers and other urban devotees from participating. There were an estimated 800 to 900 visitors on this day, with over a hundred motor vehicles and a number of air-conditioned tour buses. While the ceremony was going on, the monastery's official photographer (a wealthy Bangkok restaurateur and property developer who had ordained briefly some years earlier staying at Wat Paa Baan Taat) was busy recording the annual event (which he remarked was bigger and better organized every year). At the end of the morning ceremony in the cramped and overflowing *saalaa*, Mahaa Bua explained that some of the money donated would be distributed to his twelve branch monasteries, the rest going to the Udorn government hospital to purchase a laser machine for eye surgery. As is typical among reform forest monasteries, monetary donations are not usually kept for long. Throughout the ceremony three of Mahaa Bua's senior pupils from Udonthani province were present (they would have their *kathin* on a different date after their teacher); in order of seniority these were Ajaan Phian (Wat Paa Norng Korng), Ajaan Bunpheng (Wat Tham Klong Phen), and Ajaan In (Wat Paa Naa Kham Noi).



In another case, about 700 friends and relatives of EGAT in eighteen tour buses, complete with police escort, undertook a three-day combined *kathin* and *phaapaa* tour to the northeast during November 1988. The huge group of merit-makers was led by the earlier-mentioned Suriiphan (see Chapter Six) with a number of assistants — all senior executives of EGAT. The tour visited Man's former disciples Rian Waralaapho (Wat Aranyabanphot, Sii Chiang Mai district, Norngkhaai), then nearby Thet Thetsarangsii (Wat Hin Maak Peng, Norngkhaai); both these monasteries were for *phaapaa* offerings as formal *kathin* had already taken place earlier arranged by other wealthy Bangkok supporters. It should be noted that *phaapaa* presentations follow the traditional pattern, including a money tree (*ton-ngoen*) — with large bills, and a number of collecting trays, small domestic items for the monks such as buckets, washing detergent, soap, toilet tissue, and so on. From here, the EGAT group went on to Wat Phuuthork for *kathin* presentations some 200 kilometres away following the Maekhong; this monastery is affiliated to the late Juan Kulachettho (see Chapter Six for EGAT's involvement in the *jedii* construction). After spending the night at Wat Phuuthork, the group went on down to Sakon Nakhorn and the late Ajaan Singthorng's (senior second-generation pupil of Man) former monastery now headed by his cousin, Ajaan Oun, and finally across to Udorn and Wat Paa Baan Taat for *phaapaa* offerings, before heading back down the Friendship Highway to Bangkok. Suriiphan first started her merit-making tours in 1976 (at that time consisting of four tour buses) but, as time went on, the association became increasingly active as patrons and supporters of northeastern forest monks.

#### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INFORMAL PUPILLARY AFFILIATIONS, "SECT", AND AUTHORITY IN THE GREATER THAI SANGHA

Having shown that *nikaai* are not, *ipso facto*, important in terms of lay devotion and the interpretive functions of merit-making, the following discussion is intended as an explication and analyses of the relationship between forest monks and formal *nikaai* affiliation (which has caused some confusion for both casual observers and scholars). At the outset, it may be noted that many of Man's pupils were originally Mahaanikaai, having reordained at a time when the Thammayut were making inroads into the northeast through its monastic lines or "stems" (see Chapter Three). New opportunities for Pali and Thai studies were opened up through these stem monasteries and



promising young students sent to the capital to follow up with advanced studies at parent monasteries. Thus many northeasterners wanted to ordain, or reordain in prestigious new Thammayut monasteries, but from a number of accounts this may not have been easy. The biography of Duun Atulo (1983, pp. 4–7), another of Man's former pupils, makes this clear.

Early in his monastic career, Duun wanted to reordain in order to pursue *pariyat* studies at provincial Thammayut monasteries. However, he was not permitted to do so at that time and was instead given permission by his Mahaanikaai *upatchaa* to stay on at Wat Suthat in Ubon as a "guest monk" (*Phra-aakhantuka*) with the support of a Thammayut monk friend from the same village. After a while he tried again to reordain, but Tisso (then ecclesiastical head of Monthon Isaan) dissuaded the ambitious young monk and sent him back to his home town in Surin to teach local Mahaanikaai monks. The authorities clearly wanted to improve the monastic and educational standard among the local *sangha*, and yet rather than create conflict by direct coercion tried to implement structural changes within (through a network of teachers in both *nikaai* spread across the countryside). In any case, in the first decade of the twentieth century there were no Thammayut monasteries in Surin, and it would have been difficult for Duun to reside there for any length of time as a Thammayut monk. Yet Duun did not want to teach *dhamma* studies and, with the support from a former Wat Suthat Pali teacher, Sing Khantayaakhamo (later to become Man's right-hand pupil), eventually managed to reordain at the age of thirty-one in 1918. Duun then became a wandering monk following some of Man's disciples for a while, but later in his life found the forest life difficult and came back to his home town and, as in the case-study of Ajaan Daeng (mentioned in Chapter Five), concentrated instead on missionary work and teaching as the provincial ecclesiastical head for the Thammayut. As I intend to show, even Man expressed prudence and circumspection when it came to the question of his pupils seeking reordination.

Since the Fifth Reign, and the establishment of the Thammayut, forest-dwelling monks have been affiliated through ordination lines to one of the two Thai *nikaai*. Man was ordained in the Thammayut, though his pupils (those who saw the master as their prime source of inspiration) were formally linked to both fraternities in the Greater Thai Sangha. Both share what may be referred to as the "forest disciplinary charter". This was an outcome of doctrinal interpretations sourced in the early reform period which, impacting on traditional eremitic life ways, extended beyond historical particular-



ities to the imputed meanings and rituals of a universal tradition.

Most of Man's pupils were ordained initially in the Mahaanikaai and reordained some time later; some were ordained straight into the Thammayut, yet others ordained as Mahaanikaai and never reordained.<sup>18</sup> The overriding concerns for Man and his disciples were both personal and religio-bureaucratic; that is, on the one hand, the internalization of the *dhamma-vinaya* (at the level of personal practice) and, on the other, concordant or communalistic in the participation of normative *sangha* rituals (*Sangkhakam*).<sup>19</sup> Many informants said they reordained because (and bearing in mind the ecclesiastical restrictions on movement between *nikaai*) they wanted to "get close" (*klaichit*) and "serve" (*rapchai*) the master. The *sangha's* solidarity rituals were an important expression of group loyalties to small bands of forest monks. As mentioned before, during the *phansaa* it is traditional practice for a monastic teacher to give a sermon to his pupils every Buddhist Sabbath or Wan Phra (at a moon phase every seven days), so Man's disciples wanted to stay close to him during this time (though in fact he frequently discouraged this).

In the performance of *Sangkhakam*, precisianism and orthodoxy were espoused by the new Thammayut reformers, but forest monks believed this could be applied with the same intensity by any properly ordained monk in a suitably supportive context. Indeed, many Thammayut forest monks told me that Ajaan Chaa's Mahaanikaai monks have a reputation of stricter observance of normative *sangha* rituals than many of their Thammayut counterparts, and also in the *dhutanga* of owning only three robes (*tejiiwarikangkha*). Man believed that, while not essential, the reform Thammayut was the most supportive structure in which his pupils could maintain the "correct" monastic discipline and rituals, given, as we saw in Chapter Five, the generally poor state of the Siamese *sangha* around that time.

Although there were many forest monks in the lineage of Ajaan Man who wanted to make a clean break with the discredited local religious institutions, at the same time there were a few disciples who preferred to remain as Mahaanikaai, such as Ajaans Chaa, Mii, Thorngnat (the famous Lao pupil of Man), and Kinnarii. Thorngnat was particularly well-known in parts of the northeast during the time of Man (*Prawat Luang Puu Kinnarii Lae Luang Phor Chaa* [Biography of Luang Puu Kinnarii and Luang Phor Chaa], 1987, p. 27). He was reputed to be fierce, individualistic, and not always popular among traditional villagers with his "Zen-like" direct teaching style (*ibid.*, p. 30). Kinnarii stayed with Man for about one to two years and like his own



teacher, Thorngat, preferred to stay by himself for most of his wandering life (ibid., p. 27). He died in 1979 and, because he did not consolidate a distinctive pupillage, at the time of writing his *Thaat Phanom samnak* (Wat Kantasilaawaat) is run by a senior pupil of Ajaan Chaa named Ajaan Sorn.

Man highly praised Chaa's former Mahaanikaai teacher, Phao Phutthasaro. Phao was regarded by Man as a "real monk" (*Phra-thae*) and had ordained as a novice in Nakhorn Sawan when he was eleven, then as a monk at twenty years of age in 1892. He had undertaken extensive *thudong* practice since he was young and from 1902 onwards spent most of his time wandering in the outer forests where he met the young Chaa. In his later years Phao was particularly drawn towards the Lopburii caves (Wat Khao Wongkut) not far from his home town of Nakhorn Sawan. As popular legend has it, Phao died sitting in meditation (*Phra Kammathan*, n.d., vol. 2, pp. 182–83).

Another famous local Mahaanikaai meditation master whom Man also had much respect for was Ajaan Siithat from Thaa-uthen district in Nakhorn Phanom, active some forty years earlier than Man. The master would go and pay respects to Siithat from time to time until the latter's death during the period when Man was in the north.<sup>20</sup> It should be noted that both these early sources of inspiration for Man were unaffected by the reforms during its gestatory phase.

From various accounts, it would appear that Man did not goad his disciples into reordaining (though undoubtedly there were compelling reasons to reordain), and at times even discouraged them as in the case of Ajaans Chaa and Mii. This does not accord with Tambiah's (1984, p. 189) reading of Man's biography (translated by Siri Buddhasukh) in that "despite one or two exceptions" the master generally "insisted" his followers reordain and, using the case-studies of Ajaans Waen, Juan, and Phaang, even suggested that otherwise it would not be possible to become a disciple of Man (ibid., pp. 268, 271, 280, 286). In the case of Waen we are told that he "decided to become Mun's [Man] pupil by seeking [re]ordination" (ibid., p. 271).

In my own understanding, Man's original biography (Mahaa Bua 1986a) makes it clear that he was essentially disinterested in ideological expansionism and institutional concerns; although undoubtedly, as noted above, the reformulated interpretation of the *vinaya* (which came out of this particular historic period) provided the basis for his own monastic life. Man in fact taught monks in both *nikaai* and, according to one monastic informant, seemingly (and befitting his "purist" image) wanted to establish a practice tradition that cut across religio-political boundaries. Many of Man's



Mahaanikaai followers wanted to reordain in the early twentieth century for reasons outlined above, but Man only readily consented to some, whilst others (especially those who he felt could not make the transition smoothly) he was less inclined to encourage. As related in Waen's biography (*Luang Puu Waen Sujinno: Chiiwit-thaama lae Phrakhrung Runraek-thungrunsudthai* [Luang Puu Waen: his life, his teachings, his amulets], n.d., p. 50; probably put together by a number of hands under the sponsorship of three prominent female followers), as well as first-hand accounts, Man knew that the *arahan* path and meditative life depended solely on individual effort (praxis) and particular personal attributes necessary for the forest life such as patience, endurance, and persistence.

Waen, as it happens, was personally selected by his senior friend, Jao Khun Ubaalii, to accompany him (Waen was still a Mahaanikaai monk) to visit the north. They stayed together at Wat Jedii Luang and though unable to jointly perform *Sangkhakam*, at least maintained "purity of conduct" (*paarisut*; Pali: *parisuddhi-sila*) as regards monastic discipline and exemplary behaviour (which includes sensory restraint, proper livelihood, and conduct towards the four basic clerical "requisites" [*patjai*; Pali: *paccaya*]). Then, in 1927 Ubaalii suggested to Waen that he reordain (at the time he had about twenty *phansaa*), which would make it easier for him to participate in collective *sangha* rituals with other Thammayut monks, especially with the master.

Today most forest monasteries are Thammayut, reflecting the fact that most of Man's disciples were of this affiliation. Kirsch (1978) has pointed out that Thammayut influence was felt strongly in many northeastern rural areas, supported also by O'Connor's (1978) research showing a strong connection between the northeast, the Thammayut, and Bangkok hierarchy. Kirsch went on to say that the Thammayut monks are usually found in forest monasteries, as distinct from the Mahaanikaai monks of the village (*ibid.*, p. 62). This is the general pattern but not the complete picture, as often the forest monasteries (particularly in the central and southern provinces of the northeast) may also be Mahaanikaai. Perhaps one clear fact is that *nikaai* are far from being monolithic entities and that today there is considerable variance in the town from monastery to monastery, depending on the abbot (see also Bunnag's [1973, p. 18] urban study).<sup>21</sup> Historically, disparities normally started with polemical issues over *dhamma-vinaya* among small pupillages and when ruptures could no longer be contained in-house, fission occurred leading to the formation of new *nikaai*.



Tambiah's (1984, p. 134) comment that Man "converted" resident monks and novices at rural monasteries where he supposedly stayed during the rains retreat may be somewhat imprecise given Man's personal meditative quest and the central importance of *Sangkhakam* (an integral fact of *sangha* organization largely overlooked by many writers). My reasoning is that first, as mentioned earlier, Man never stayed at occupied village monasteries during the rains (as Tambiah [1987, p. 119] claims) but sought either provincial Thammayut monasteries or occasionally abandoned Mahaanikaai forest monasteries, and a few times resided in the capital with his ethnic-Lao *pariyat* monk friends. The second reason is that it would be a highly unlikely scenario for precision Thammayut monks to stay with local village monks throughout the *phansaa* (if at all), regardless of where they are situated. It may be remembered that in the case of Duun he was discouraged from reordaining to a great extent because there were no Thammayut monasteries in Surin at that time. However, Tambiah (1984) correctly notes that whilst Man did not found any monasteries, he "ennobled" those he stayed at by his presence, as well "initiating" some newly ordained (and reordained) monks inspired by his teachings to the "meditative vocation" (*ibid.*, p. 134).

Because of the issue of purity involved in the perpetuation of *nikaai*, interaction between forest monks in both *nikaai* is restricted to informal meetings of the *sangha*. Normally the Thammayut forbid even temporary residence of Mahaanikaai monks, but with the exception of the three-month rains retreat, in some forest monasteries this rule has been interpreted flexibly (as is typical with normative rules in Thai society generally). However, one normally finds that at Thammayut forest monasteries during important *sangha* rituals, any visiting Mahaanikaai wandering monks are expected to sit separately (unless invited to do otherwise) and at the time of eating have food passed down to them at the end of the line. In contradistinction, when a Thammayut forest monk is visiting a Mahaanikaai forest monastery, he is permitted to sit in line according to seniority (something which as we saw in Chapter Three, the Mahaanikaai have always insisted should take precedence in formal *sangha* affairs). Also, Thammayut monks may at some Mahaanikaai forest monasteries have food offered to them in a ritually pure manner separately by a lay person (*prakher*; Pali: *sakkaccam sahattha deti*, to formally present something to the monk with both hands). Thus one finds that during meal time, when food reaches them in line passed down by Mahaanikaai monks, it has to be "offered" a second time by a lay person (thus symbolically ratifying the historic institutional division between the two *nikaai*).



These institutional segmentations in the Greater Thai Sangha were germinated in the capital and filtered out into the countryside in the first few decades of the twentieth century. Informants spoke of simmering hostilities (such as when Thammayut *pariyat* monks were placed in local positions of authority overriding Mahaanikaai monks with more *phansaa*) persisting up to the present. Similarly, the antagonism between vocational preferences cross-cut by *nikaai* was just as problematic. Thus not only did *pariyat* monks in both *nikaai* to some extent show rancour towards each other, but both voiced disapprobation of forest monks in either *nikaai*. Ajaan Thui (Wat Paa Daan Wiwek, Norngkhaai) occasionally treks off to the *meuang* to pay respects to the Jao Khana Phaak (Sangha Regional Governor, Thammayut). Knowing that Thui receives considerable oblations, he is expected to contribute towards alleviating some of the monastery's substantial administrative overheads and debts which Thui reputedly told his pupils were typical of extravagant living inappropriate for proper monks.

Mahaa Bua also provides financial support to the Thammayut's provincial centre, Wat Phothisomphon (established at Udorn in 1923; see Chapter Three), with presently around fifty monks and 240 novices, most of whom attend the Pali and *dhamma* courses (at the time of my visits, there were seventeen Pali teachers and six *nak tham* or "scriptural" teachers). To one side, at the rear of the monastery, there was once a special walled section which was used exclusively for the Thammayut's wandering *kammathaan* monks during the time of Man. However, presently with many dispersed and routinized forest monasteries throughout the countryside, forest monks rarely have reason to stay here. A number of Man's key pupils, as we saw earlier, were ordained at this monastery under its founder, Phra Thammajedii "Mahaa Juum". The provision of monetary support and occasional courtesy visits to administrative-ranking monks are seen as ways in which the relationship between provincial Thammayut monasteries and well-known Thammayut forest monasteries can be maintained.

In the district town of So Phisai (in Norngkhaai province), there was recent conflict between *nikaai* over the re-establishment of an old disused monastery. A long-abandoned Mahaanikaai monastery was settled by a group of Thammayut monks selected by their ecclesiastical district head (Jao Khana Amphoe) at the invitation of the local villagers. When the local Jao Khana Amphoe Mahaanikaai heard about this he decided he would also send monks to reclaim the monastery. It is not certain if there was a faction in the village supporting the Mahaanikaai, but when the Thammayut went out on



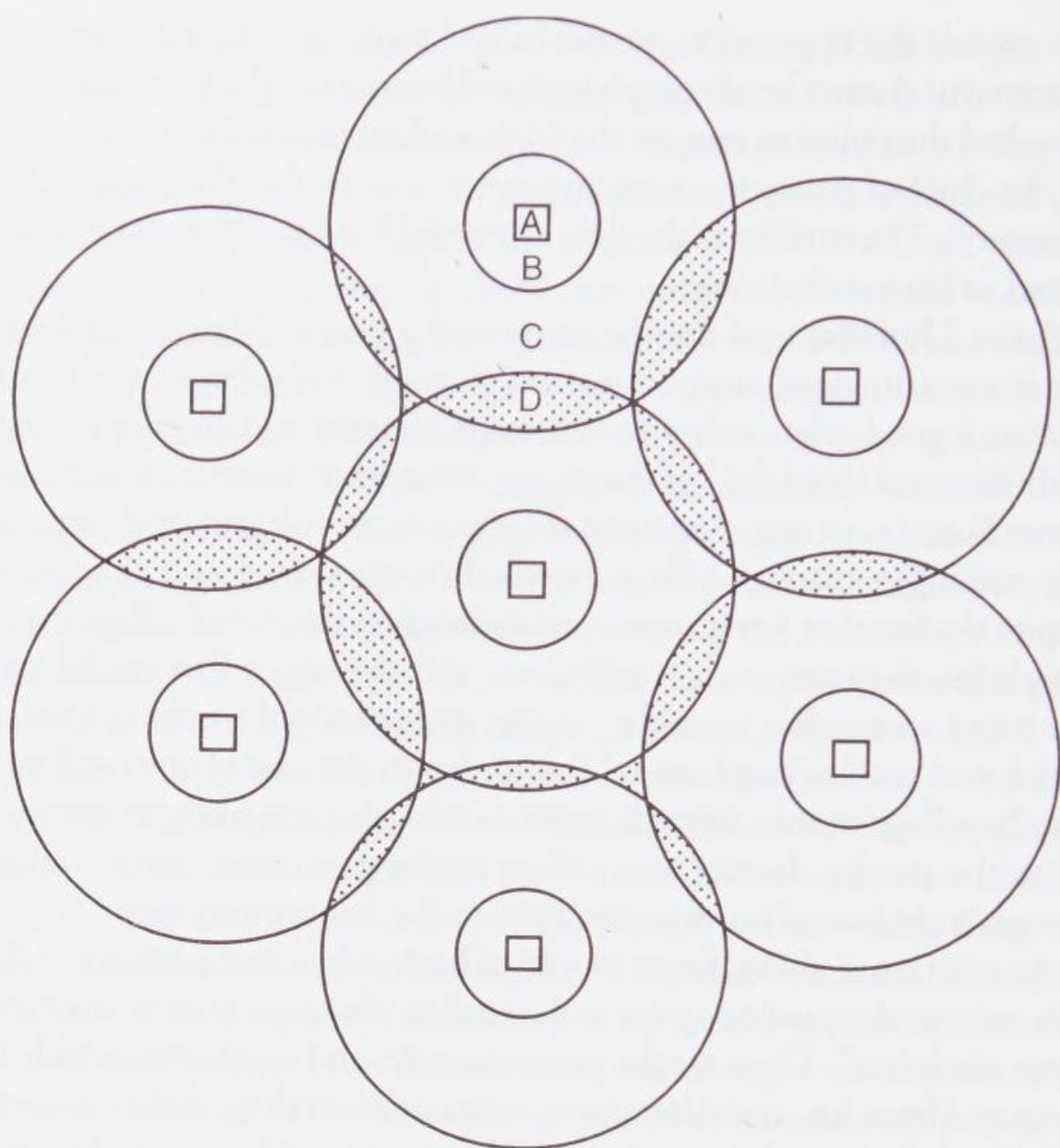
alms-round, the opposition moved in and took over the monastery. The Thammayut district head complained to his senior in the province, who in turn asked the police to remove the Mahaanikaai monks (and it so happens that the chief of police is a keen supporter of a nearby Thammayut forest monastery). The conflict at the time of my field-work in the area eventually seemed to have settled down.

Ajaan Thui also said that he supported a nearby Mahaanikaai village monastery (financial support passed through the village headman) to cultivate a good relationship as, although spatially and ritually separated, within the total social field of the village community there are mutual social intersections (as in receiving alms from the same villagers, and sometimes lines crossing — though village monks do not always go on alms-round). Despite the fact that forest monks are situated on the rim of village cognatic boundaries, the fuzzy social purlieus — and thus apart (see model on the next page), in another sense they are an integral social whole as Thui, and other forest monks, emphasize. I found that in the case of any local resentment by village monks towards forest monks, this was likely to reverberate out to the nearby district town, then to the provincial centre and back through ecclesiastical bureaucratic lines to the forest monastery.

As mentioned above, forest monks of both *nikaai* in the lineage of Ajaan Man refer to the pristine *winai* and so-called *dhutanga* as their charter, the “forest discipline”. These are the particular rules and regulations which Man re-enacted from his, and Ajaan Sao’s, own understanding of the *vinaya* texts available to them at the time (we can thus see how Man was indeed influenced by the reforms). In Chapter Five I mentioned the importance of the *Buphasikkhaawannanaa* (Amaraaphirakkhit 1982; see especially pp. 383–84), an exegetical work on *vinaya* inspired by the Sinhalese commentaries, and a product of the early reforms in the late part of the nineteenth century. This work contains an explication on minutiae and duties for living in the forest (Pali: *Araññikavatta*) found in the *Cullavagga* (Horner 1975), faithfully followed over the years by many contemporary northeastern forest monks.

Monastic daily routine, meditation, and behavioural matters are the direct concern of forest monks, teachers referring to their teachers who in turn may have sought authority in the *Buphasikkhaa* (it may be remembered that the later more widely read treatise on *vinaya* by Wachirayaan was structured largely for the ecclesiastical *dhamma* examinations and was thus popular among town monks). As an example, the text deals with routine procedures from first rising in the morning and preparing for alms-round;





- A = village monasteries  
 B = domestic administrative boundaries  
 C = outer village cognatic boundaries/purlicues  
 D = marginal interstices/forest monasteries

placing the alms-bowl in its sling, putting on the double-robcs (see the discussion in Chapter Seven) — thus taking all three robes on alms-round — then the sandals, placing the alms-bowl sling strap over one shoulder (*jangoilai*), closing the *kuti* windows, and ensuring that the body is correctly covered (the so-called three-circles [*monthon saam*], namely, the knees and lower part, middle-part, and the upper shoulders and neck — the “covered mode” of wearing the robe, see Griswold [1966]).

The text then goes on to discuss the preliminaries before entering the village; the forest monk (any monk for that matter on alms-round) must



remove his footwear, which is then placed in a shoe-bag (today this is normally done at the *saalaa* — the place where the food will be collectively eaten — before leaving the monastery). In the days of the *Buphasikkhaa*'s author, the forest was conterminous with the village and it would have been risky walking barefooted in the half-light through the forest. A section of this text also deals with the ritual offering (*prakhen*; see comment above) of the alms-bowl, either by a novice or a lay person, before proceeding on alms-round. Among forest monks in Man's lineage sometimes even the bowl is *prakhen* again a second time after alms-round — in case food had been incorrectly offered during the alms-round. If one is alone in the forest and there is no one to *prakhen* the bowl, then the bowl has to be rinsed out with water to remove dust particles which may have accumulated in the bowl overnight. In accordance with the monks' discipline, anything which is not correctly offered to monks cannot be consumed (monastic informants told me this includes even dust particles), a standard which I found most forest monks consciously attempt to maintain.

The *Buphasikkhaa* also deals with such matters as storing drinking water in the forest (before the advent of plastic buckets and galvanized iron tanks). It mentions that if there is no manufactured water container handy, one can improvise by using bamboo and shows how to make bamboo containers. Then again, if there is no bamboo around, a forest monk should dig a hole near his hut (presumably lined with clay) and store water there. Another aspect of the forest practice deals with the method of making fire with fire-sticks (*mai sii fai*) which a wandering monk needs to carry with him at all times. Today it may be a box of matches, but most older forest monks know how to make fire without this convenience, though making a fire to warm oneself, except for reasons of health, is forbidden in the *vinaya*.

From the above discussion it may be apparent that in the enactment of the *dhamma-vinaya*, northeastern forest monks tend to go beyond the socialized role which one finds among the more domesticated *sangha*. Indeed, I would suggest that the primitive charter of the monks' disciplinary code is given real meaning among these contemporary forest monk communities (see also Carrithers [1983, p. 168] on the Sinhalese forest monks).

\* \* \* \* \*

In this chapter, as a psychological and social dimension, I discussed the concerns of political insecurity peaking in the 1970s and the perceived need



for indigenous sources of merit power in the periphery. This involved both the élite and an emergent expansionary *nouveau riches* which had the effect of hastening change towards domestication and incorporation of forest monks into the heart of the Thai state and religious consciousness.

I also questioned whether within the social configuration and compact of forest monks and the nation's rich and powerful, forest monks should be seen as vehicles of state expansion. Here, I suggested that the issue needed to be considered in terms of historical particularities at the time and the relative position of forest monks within the Greater Thai Sangha.

Though clearly influenced by the Fifth Reign reforms as many north-eastern monks were, Man was not a roaming missionary for the state, as some writers have suggested. In my understanding, Man was concerned predominantly with his own "liberating quest" at times seeking direction from specific texts from the early reform period, as well as his own intuitive and noetic comprehension of doctrinal religion. However, there was no doubt that the master and his extensive line of pupils were ideally placed to act as agents of reform Buddhism in the far reaches of the countryside.

## NOTES

1. The monk responsible was apparently named Phra Pan (1824–94) (Lingat 1933, p. 102). While still a novice Pan went to Bangkok to receive ordination at Wat Saket in the Mahaanikaai. However, he was soon dissatisfied with life in the Mahaanikaai and eventually, after meeting Mongkut, reordained under him in 1849 at Wat Bowornniwet. Here he studied Pali until eventually receiving the honorific title "Mahaa". In 1854 Ang-Duong, the Kampuchean king, asked Mongkut to send a mission to the capital Udong to establish the reform *nikaai*. Mahaa Pan was sent as mission head with another six monks. The king made Mahaa Pan monastic head of Wat Salaka in Udong. In 1867 when the capital was transferred to Phnom Penh, King Norodom asked Mahaa Pan to take up residence at Wat Botum Wodei and gave him the title Somdet Phra Sukanthathipati. This was the centre for the Thammayut in Kampuchea until more recent times.
2. Simultaneously there has also been a rise over the past fifteen to twenty years in the number of "magically gifted" Luang Phor monks (Peltier, in Mulder [1985, p. 51]), as well as animistic beliefs, the use of protective amulets and the like; see also Chapter Six.



3. Man's wide acclaim as *arahan* is considered beyond dispute (Keyes 1975*b*, p. 70; Tambiah 1984, p. 136).
4. Man's concern in the correct laying of the *jongkrom* path suggests that he was influenced as much by rational, cognitive factors as traditional cosmology. As enumerated in Mahaa Bua (1986*b*, pp. 229–31), he instructed his pupils to construct the meditation walkway on an east-to-west axis, or southwest-to-northeast, or southeast-to-northwest, "following the sunlight" (see also Mahaa Bua [n.d., p. 14]).

Keyes (1975*c*, p. 57) remarks on the significance of the east-to-west axis in relation to a cremation ritual, symbolizing opposing dualities, birth and death. West is associated with death, where the sun sets, east with birth and auspiciousness. Terwiel (1975, p. 285) makes similar observations in his central Thai study. In fact one may note a cosmo-structural design in the layout of certain village settlements and positioning of the monastery, the *bot*, and Buddha image.

5. By "political" I concur with Leach (1973), who described a person engaged in political action as behaving in "such a way as to rally others to support a cause in which he is interested" (*ibid.*, p. 29).
6. Primitive Buddhism *per se* was basically apolitical, although its subsequent adaptation and acculturation in mission lands gave it a political orientation. It became politicized in mainland Southeast Asia by about the mid-fourteenth century. Although at Pagan, Theravada Buddhism had made its presence felt in the Burmese polity as early as the eleventh century.
7. O'Connor (1985, p. 25 n. 10) sees the "theory-practice" rift not so much in terms of a competitive struggle between two entrenched vocations, but as a traditional dialectic between two classic poles of Buddhism. Zack views it as an "informal tendency towards specialisation" (1977, p. 19).

As I have tried to show throughout, historic *nikaai* divisions in the Thai *sangha* cross-cut traditional vocational preferences, leading to a polarization within *nikaai*. Thus it would be fallacious to try to evaluate *nikaai* solely in terms of these traditional vocations, though some villagers spoke of Thammayut as *patibat* and Mahaanikaai as *pariyat*, which was because of their own experience with the local monastery [Mahaanikaai] concerned with teaching and the nearby forest monastery [Thammayut] concerned with *vinaya* and meditation (see village survey in Appendix B. In the countryside this is predominantly the model, though in the *meuang*, monasteries affiliated to both *nikaai* serve similar functions (and with little difference in appearance).

8. This was accurate at the time of writing, and in fact was subsequently proven to be true. Chawalit went on to form the New Aspiration Party.



9. I am indebted to Professor Chalong Soontravanich, Department of History, Chulalongkorn University for details pertaining to Chalieu Yuuwithayaa.
10. In the *mae chii khana*, yet standing apart, was a well-known local meditating *mae chii* who goes around with the appearance of a fully ordained monk. She claims to have been “ordained” by Wan himself, and certainly was held in high esteem by other *mae chii*. I have never known of a similar case anywhere in the northeast and it deserves investigating more thoroughly in the future.
11. The focus on *jedii* for merit-making in the forest tradition (at the “terminal phase”) may be comparable with Tambiah’s (1970, pp. 146–47) findings among northeastern villagers which ranked the construction of a monastery as bringing the most merit.
12. As Ingersoll (1975, pp. 237–38) and Tambiah (1968, p. 52; 1970, p. 57) found among Thai villagers, individual and communal “enjoyment” (*sanuk*) in general typifies all ritual activities.
13. Merit-making tourists also include villagers who may hire a less-expensive non-air-conditioned “red bus” and head off on a boisterous, inebriated, and rowdy pleasure-seeking tour to visit popular pilgrimage sites or *Luang Phor* magical monks. These tours stay away from ascetic forest monasteries.
14. This contrasts with Bunnag’s (1970a, p. 94; 1973, pp. 62–64) findings that non-specific prestations — with presumably merit carrying the same value for all monks — are regarded as more meritorious.
15. The term *phaapaa*, literally “forest cloth” (probably *phaapaachaa*, “cloth discarded in the charnel grounds”), is from the Pali *pamsukula-civara* (*phaa bangsukun*). This is plain white cloth (though whole robes may be given at ceremonies held at village or urban monasteries) left for the monks to take as discarded in the traditional manner.

The ceremony of *phaapaa* (*thort phaapaa*) may be held at any time of the year outside of *phansaa* (an addition to the principal ritual for offering “robes” *thort kathin*) and an opportunity for spontaneous presentation of cloth and other items to forest monks (with minimum ritual). In this traditional mode, “discarded cloth” (to make “rag-robes” — though in practice one will offer the best possible material) is left for wandering monks to pick up on forest paths (in this case no formal offering [*prakhien*] is necessary).

See Bunnag (1973, p. 117), on the significance of *phaapaa* at Ayutthayaa, and Wells (1975, pp. 111–12) for a dated but still relevant general outline.

16. See also Wells (1975, pp. 111–12) and Anuman (1986, pp. 81–83).
17. To complete the image of the “world-renouncing ascetic”, Man would also make his own sandals from the hide of cattle killed by tigers (interview, Ajaan Wiriyang, Wat Thammongkhon, Bangkok, 1987).



18. From a small sample of Man's disciples (first generation), 59 per cent actually reordained; 12 per cent remained Mahaanikaai throughout; and 29 per cent had been Thammayut before meeting the master. This shows the variability in ordination pattern and formal affiliation which makes a simple generalization problematic.
19. The *Sangkhakam* (Acts of the Sangha), includes the important fortnightly recitation of the *paatimok* — with the requisite *sangha* of four fully ordained monks and over. Thus at small *samnakh* where there are not enough monks to constitute a *sangha* they must try to group with other nearby communities in order to make a quorum (see also Khantipalo [1969, p. 51]) and if this is not possible then the *vinaya* has an option; two or three monks (*khana*) can inform each other of their "purity" and a monk by himself can make an *athitthaan* (virtues to be established in the mind) or "determination" by oneself (particularly relevant for forest monks living in isolation). Thus there are "three causes ... of *Uposatha* ... [with] three methods, corresponding to these" (Wachirayaan 1973, pp. 95–96).

Then there is *bhikkhu* ordination (*Upasampathaa*) and weekly (in accordance with phases of the moon), *Wan Phra* or *Uposot* (Pali: *Uposatha*). Also the *Pavarana*, a special one-day ceremony marking the termination of the rains retreat where monks seek admonishment. The establishment of *siimaa* (for a discussion, see Chapter Four, endnote 3) is another important "Act of the Sangha". In fact, disputes may easily arise over the establishment of *siimaa* for the performance of formal "Acts of the Sangha", evidenced by early accounts of the *Sihalabhikkhu* at Martaban, Sukhothai, Chiang Mai, and Mongkut's Thammayut Khana.

The performance of *Sangkhakam* is integral to the perpetuation of *nikaai* (Khantipalo 1969). In general the *Uposatha* is an essential expression of *sangha* purity, a reaffirmation of fundamental and normative values (Carrithers 1983, pp. 142–43). Carrithers also found that in Sri Lanka the *Uposatha* ceremony was considered more significant to forest monks than to local village monks.

The only important *sangha* community rituals at most forest monasteries are the fortnightly recitation of the *paatimok*, as Yalman (1962) also found at Selave. This ritual formulation was the pattern in the early forest *sangha* around the time of the Buddha where ascetic practitioners were "exempted from many other [*sangha*] formalities" (Dutt 1977, p. 50). The *Uposatha* is an important occasion for forest monks to meet and a time when general instruction on matters of conduct and practice may be discussed after the *paatimok* recitation.

20. Interview with Man's former disciple, Thongkham Praphaan, Sakon Nakhorn province, 1989.



21. Some Wat Bowornniwet monks told me that the only real differences in appearance these days between *nikaai* in urban monasteries are in the manner of handling money, the way in which Thammayut monks do not wear footwear outside the monastery, and the different mode of reckoning in the religious calendar. In this latter regard, Mongkut's precise astronomical calculation has meant that *Sangkhakam* may differ by one day to the traditional Mahaanikaai mode of calculation (as in the day following Wan Phra).

Other traditional differences found at larger urban monasteries are that Mahaanikaai novices do not cover their right shoulders on *binthabaat*; the Mahaanikaai monks often consume milk or milk powder in their evening drinks; and the *jiwon* (the inner or upper robe — though the word is often taken to include all three robes) is rolled on the outside (Mahaanikaai) while with the Thammayut it is on the inside.



## CHAPTER TEN

# *Summary and Concluding Comments*

In the first three chapters, my concerns were in laying a historical basis — both general and particular — for a discussion on the northeastern forest monk tradition and the lineage of Ajaan Man. I then went on in Chapter Four to sketch Man's life, as well as the formative peripatetic period of the master's lineage based on an oral teaching tradition which, through subsequent transmission, reification, and textualization was brought into the heart of the nation-state and its semantic-institutional field.

In order to understand "forest monasticism" as enacted in the northeast within the configuration of the Greater Thai Sangha, I contrasted this with alternative religious strands, urban monasticism, and the literate cultural tradition and "popular" beliefs and practices (see especially Chapters One, Six, and Appendix B). I see these various strands as constituting the same continuum but with different orientations; the various beliefs and practices constituting Thai religion in its widest sense. Thus we have the many popular cults around forest monks, as well the utilitarian "popular saints" and the more reclusive rationalist practitioners. While assuming there are certain persisting features and structural themes running through this totality, I do not see these in any way as hermetically sealed. Rather, within the total amalgam there are dynamic points of convergence between the various constituent strands, though some more refracted than others from the assumed textual bases of doctrinal religion.

The nineteenth century confluence of national ideology and religion through educational reforms are the watershed in this analysis where Thai-Lao forest monks — as exemplars of the primitive forest way — were



brought into the circumscribing centralized polity and eventually to the surge of national attention and apotheosis (see especially Chapter Three).

In the above regard, the multiplex network of formal and informal relationships between northeasterners in the periphery and ecclesiastical and secular élites proved decisive in grafting Man's lineage onto the overarching frame of normative institutional religion (Chapters Three to Five); this started to take place during the latter part of Man's life, especially after his luminary phase of eleven years in the teak forests and mountains in the north. Importantly, there were linkages through formal ordination lines in the Thammayut and also a pervading sense of regional identity (northeastern monks told me that when they visited the capital they normally first went to pay respects to the most senior northeastern *somdet* resident at a monastery for northeastern monks in Bangkok). As noted in Chapter Five, there were also the many informal kinship connections among Man's disciples and *pariyat* monks in the capital.

The formal sanction and subsequent infusion into the stream of orthodoxy came about through historical associations with the precisian and élitist Thammayut. This was the phase when Man's lineage, though on the outside rim of social order (and thus seen by many as opposed to rational structure) actually worked within the expansion and consolidation of the Thai nation-state. Then, once transfixed into the heart of Thai religious consciousness, Man's early northeastern pupils very soon became regarded as the nation's supreme achievers, the focus of immense devotion (in a country where the "teacher" has always been centrally situated) and an elative model for the domesticated *sangha*. In other words, Man's reinvigorated forest tradition became incorporated into the mystical core of normative religion — affirmed in the hearts and minds of devout Thai, and some Laotians. This was achieved largely through the print-media and the many hagiographies (particularly, and importantly, in the nation's capital) and oral legends circulating in the countryside.

We saw in Chapter Six that the many multi-million baht *jedii* (universal symbols of sanctity and popular devotion, see Photograph 5 in Chapter Six, Ajaan Fan's relic-museum at Phannaanikhom district, Sakon Nakhorn), which today dot the northeastern landscape with sacred sites, are indices to the immense popularity of indigenous *arahan*. These *jedii* became important pilgrimage sites embedded in the logic and complex ideology of merit (Chapter Nine).

In the routinization process — which went hand-in-hand with national recognition — we note essentially creative binary opposites within the con-



figuration of centre-periphery tensions exhibiting a variety of, in Tambiah's words, "pulsations" and "oscillations". From the periphery we also looked at how frontier-dwelling monks residing on the fringe of organized space and domesticated order could be transformed into the heart of Thai religiosity. With this frame in mind (and necessary shifts in focus), my primary concern was in exploring the interplay and dimensions of power between the state and its new stream-lined bureaucracy, and the wandering monastics in the far provinces.

Ajaan Man spent most of his life in these patternless distant provinces (the taboo-loaded places) and, though ordaining under Mongkut's personally chosen northeastern missionary monk, eschewed the institutional *sangha* and went out wandering alone for many years until eventually, in the process, gathered around him a network of pupils. Man lived as he taught, embodying the very ideals of the universal Buddhist virtuoso which ensured his eventual integration into the prevailing social grid. But Man's acceptance in the interiority of national religious ideology came gradually as the Thai state was extending its hegemonic control over these frontier provinces. Simultaneously, the state made use of some of Man's wandering pupils (those who had previously been educated in its Pali and Thai studies programme) to spearhead educational reforms in the hard-to-reach rural settlements and promote doctrinal Buddhism through pervasive Thammayut lines (Chapters Four and Five). In fact the growth and ramification of forest *samnakh* at Man's "impact points" frequently paralleled the establishment of localized bases of state expansionism (see especially Chapter Four). The Thammayut's wandering disciples of Man were thus passive conveyers and ground-breakers for the territorial state — though there were modalities of participatory interest among forest monks in this regard.

In contrasting forest monasticism in Sri Lanka and Thailand, we saw both universal similarities and historical particularities. Because of the relative interdependence of *sangha* and state, Thailand does not exhibit such a radical *sangha* history of divisive altercations or schismatic cleavages as in Sri Lanka. The recent case of Santi Asok's Phra Phothirak (and regional personalities such as Khruubaa Siwichai before him) shows how difficult it is to work outside the parameters of the state's constitutional framework and its tightly controlled *sangha*. In Thailand, potential reformers like Man tended to work within the establishment — though at the far interstices — and emerge from time to time in response to particular historical conditions (see also Keyes [1987, p. 141]).

In the ensuing discursive interaction between centralized bureaucratic



power and the frontier provinces, a multiplicity of social, economic, and political factors were discussed which impacted on the lives of forest monks and which brought about changes in the direction of monastic domestication (see Chapters Seven and Eight). Thus, the early quasi-domiciled phase of wandering with temporary encampments, emblematic of the primitive monastic regimen, led to the proliferation of settled bases. Eventually, with the support from the state and influential localized patronage (aligned to the metropolis) these forest-monk residences (*samnak song*) become sanctified monasteries — as we saw in the case of Wat Aranyawaasii, Thaabor district, Norngkhaai (Chapter Four) — and forest monks themselves more or less monastery-bound (though this was inherent to some extent in the new *sangha* regulations, starting with Wachirayaan's initiatives around the turn of the century). However, forest monks continued with *ad hoc* seasonal wandering (see Chapter Six on the wandering regimen). This domestication process was viewed in historical context with corresponding social implications taking place in four distinct phases: peripatetic, settlement, climacteric, and terminal (detailed in Chapter Seven).

In this study I attempted to de-mystify and position Man's lineage on firm contemporary and historical ground. I felt it would be fallacious to attempt to assess changes simply from within the immured social field of the monks themselves (micro dimensions and corresponding synchronic field study). Lines and intersections to the wider social order, cemented significantly through alliances with political and influential patronage (Chapters Seven, Eight, and Nine), as well as historical processes are, as we have seen, many.

The historical scenario since World War II presents a complex, interlocking social configuration impacting on the northeastern forest monk habitat. These factors mentioned in Chapter Six onwards may be briefly summarized as follows: From the late 1940s to the late 1950s, sectarian fracas (ending in the 1962 Sangha Act and renewed secular power and authority over the *sangha*); national religious revival around the 2,500-year half-millennium celebrations and resonances from U Nu's state patronage of Buddhism in Burma (especially the sponsoring of the Sixth Great Buddhist Council); resurgence of interest in meditation and Burmese-inspired *wipatsanaa*; the Thammayut's Thai-Lao pupils of Man starting to become known in the capital with the interest in meditation at Wat Bowornniwet's weekly lay sessions held by the abbot — a high-ranking admirer of Man (in large part a response to Wat Mahaatha's nation-wide meditation



programme and interest shown by the Bangkok élite).

In the beginning of the 1960s the first recorded organized tour of professional élite supporters leaves the capital to the northeastern *samnak* (corresponding with the Communist Party of Thailand's pronouncement of armed struggle in the countryside). This was during Sarit's national development — with support from the United States — and the emergence of a new rich searching for traditional means of moral legitimation. At the same time the establishment sought to enhance its authority and political might. The end of the 1960s led to a period of deep-seated apprehension, insecurity, and turmoil caused by the Second Indochina war, anti- and pro-American emotions, and harsh domestic oppression. During the period 1975–77 (following communist victories in Cambodia and Laos) students and communist insurgents joined up in the *maquis* (especially the *Phuuphaan* in the northeast, sharing the same ecology as forest monks), with the increased presence of the military up-country (needing sources of objectified charisma and centres of domestic sanctity). By this time the local reputation of Man's lineage had gained momentum and was brought into the hearts and minds of a responsive and eager urban élite during a period of social and political anxiety.

The 1970s saw the proliferation of written life accounts in the metropolis, starting with Mahaa Bua's controversial biography of his mystical — but orthodox — teacher. The late 1970s experienced relative stability and control in the countryside and the peak of devotional activity with regular pilgrimages to the northeastern *samnak*. By the following decade many first-generation disciples of Man had started to disappear, their parent monasteries no longer the residence of practising forest monks, and the teacher's *jedii* now the locus of occasional ritual merit-making at the “terminal” phase of the parent monastery. Through this process, culminating in the *jedii* and relic cult (though not the fundamental soteriology for many Thai Buddhists), northeastern forest monks in the lineage of Man were on occasions initially feared, mistrusted, and yet eventually revered.

Underlying the overall study are the inherent dialectics and corresponding tensions which have brought about compromise (an enfeebling synthesis) on the traditional life ways of the northeastern *kammathan* monks. With increasing “distance” (disinterested detachment) between the worldly renouncer situated both outside and above, and the wider society in which he sought escape, the more the individual practitioner gains in luminosity and moral purity. Thus, being at the potent mystical (*saksit*) dimensions of cosmic order, correspondingly the more meritorious and sought-after the



monastic recluse becomes. Paradoxically, as Weber (1970, p. 327) suggests, in renouncing or abnegating the world, in his higher spirituality the recluse may also accrue special magical powers which permits potential mastery over the mundane dimension. The problem for ascetic practitioners seems to be one of trying to out-distance the fervent laity wishing to connect with these powers through oblations and in so doing transform them to certain worldly advantage (see Chapters Six and Seven).

The present situation in the northeast is such that there are few places where forest-dwelling monks can remain in their essential secluded cloisters, in a mutualistic interdependence with nature; and as we saw, the outlook in this regard is grim. A number of monastic informants seemed increasingly concerned with matters of ecology and the environment, as in maintaining systems equilibrium, though they were careful that this action was seen as apolitical. Those who were less active in this regard nevertheless saw the importance of a supportive forest environment for the perpetuation of face-to-face pupillary networks, the particular set of rituals associated with forest-dwelling monasticism and individual practice.

Most forest monks felt that wider social, political, and economic changes — as *kammic* consequences — were inevitable and thus, rather than looking outwards and being involved in politico-religious concerns, instead stressed introspective mental cultivation and “*dhamma* within the heart” (a liberating as well as protective strategy against uncontrollable negative outside forces). But then this is precisely what one could expect from individuals seemingly concerned with world transcendence, and in moving upwards from the less pure levels of mundanity, attempting to leave behind (in varying degrees) conditioned attachments and reflexive responses to the sensual world.

But the fact remains that the forest monk tradition reaffirmed and reinvigorated by Man in the early twentieth century is fast receding with the nation's forests and the spoiling of the master's remaining first-generation pupils through perfervid attention from the laity (in this latter regard as history has shown time and again). Informants were generally agreed that with fewer “good teachers” and an enfeebled tradition (that is, the particular discipline and meditation practice constituting the forest life ways), the opportunity to work out one's personal liberation and secure release from worldly ties may be increasingly problematical and fraught with contradictions and distortions — perhaps leading again to a conscious need for revitalization.



## APPENDICES



# APPENDIX A FOREST MONASTERIES WITH LINEAGE CONNECTIONS TO PHRA AJAAN MAN

Monastery	Province	District	Teacher <sup>1</sup>	Year Deceased
Prachaakhom (Paa Kung)	Roi Et	Siisomdet	Sii	
Samnak Wiwekaasom	"	Selaphuum	Maa	
Prachaaniyom <sup>2</sup>	Kaalasiri	Meuang	Daeng (Buasii)	1987
Paa Tham Phaapuu	Loei	Wangsaphung	Chorp	
Tamphaapuunimit	"	Meuang	Khamdii (Siithorn)	1984
Paa Amphawan	"	"	Saamaa	
Sii Amphaiwan	"	"	Thorn <sup>3</sup>	
Paa Siisurthaawaat <sup>2</sup>	"	"	Siijan <sup>4</sup>	
Tham Phaabing	"	Wangsaphung	Lui (Montrii)	
Paa Traiwiwek	Surin	Meuang	Saam	1989
Buuraphaaraam <sup>2</sup>	"	"	Duun (Rattanaakornwisut)	
Kantasilaawaat	Nakhorn Phanom	Thaat Phanom	Kinnarii (Sorn)	1983
Baan Khaa <sup>2</sup>	"	Sii Songkhraam	Teur (Baan)	1979
Phochai	"	"	Kirng (Daeng)	1974
Aranyawiwek	"	"	Baan <sup>5</sup>	1965
Siithep-pradirthaaraam <sup>2</sup>	"	Meuang	Jan Khemiyo (Phromman)	
Tham Phuuthong <sup>9</sup>	"	Naakae	Bunmii	1973
Tham Phuuvwua <sup>6</sup>	"	Sekaa	U-Thai	
? Paa <sup>7</sup>	"	Thaa-uthen	Oun Thammatharo	
Aranyikaawaat <sup>2</sup>	"	Meuang	Suwan (Khamdii)	Unknown
Paa Saalawan <sup>2</sup>	Khoraat	Meuang	Sing (Phut)	1958/59
Siriwanbanphot (Baan Khok Noi) <sup>2</sup>	"	Soengsaang	Wiira <sup>8</sup>	1961
Paa Satthaaruam <sup>2</sup>	"	Meuang	Mahaa Pin Panyaaphalo (Samaan)	
Wachiraalongkorn (Wat Yai) <sup>2</sup>	"	Paakchong	Jan Khemasiri	1946
Udomkhongkhaakhiirikhet (Wat Dun) <sup>2</sup>	Khorn Kaen	Manjaakhiirii	Phaang (P.K. Winaihorn)	Unknown
Paa Baan Khor	"	Baan Faang	Mahaa Bunthan	1984
Paa Wiwektham <sup>2</sup>	"	Meuang	Sing/Siiho (Bunpheng Kappathamko)	
Banphothkhiirii (Phuujorkor)	Mukdaahaan	Khamcha <sup>ii</sup>	Laa Khemmapatta	
Pan Baan Taat	Udorn	Meuang	Mahaa Bua	
Prachaachumphon (Paa Baan Norng Yai)	"	"	Ornsaa	Unknown (see above)
Paa Siithon	"	"	Khan	



Tham Klongphen	"	Norngbualamphuu	Khao (Bunpheng Khemanphirato)	1983
Paa Sirisaalawan	"	"	Bunmaa (Suwajo)	1980
Paa Baan Norng Saeng	"	Norngwuasor	Bua (Sen)	1975
Paa Nikhrothaaraam	"	"	Orn (Siinuan)	1982
Doi Thepnimit (Thamkia)	"	"	Mii	
Tham Sahaaiitham	"	"	Janrian	
Paa Santikaawaat	"	Chaiwan	Bunjan	
Paa Norng Korng <sup>9</sup>	"	Baan Pheur	Phian	
Paa Baan Khor	"	"	Thuun	
Paa Saarawaarii	"	"	Bunchuu <sup>10</sup>	
Paa Phuuthorng	"	"	Phong	
Paa Rattanuanaaraam	"	"	Suweng	
Paa Prasithitham <sup>11</sup>	"	Baandung	Phrom (Phaang)	1969
Paa Naa Kham Noi <sup>9</sup>	"	Naa Yuung	In	
Tham Jaophuukhaa <sup>12</sup>	"	Phannaanikhom	Kuu	1953
Paa Udom Somphorn	"	"	Fan (Plaeng)	1977
Paa Klaangnonphuu	"	"	Kwaa (Lii)	1976
Tham Khaam <sup>13</sup>	"	"	Khiam	
Doi Thammajedii	"	Khoksisuphan	Kongmaa (Baen)	1962
Paa Kaewchumphon <sup>9</sup>	"	Sawaang Daendin	Singthorng (Oun)	1980
Paa Prasitsaamakkhii <sup>9</sup>	"	"	Suphat (Bulan)	1980
Paa Siisawaang Daendin	"	"	Bun Chinawaso	
Tham Aphaidamrongtham <sup>14</sup>	"	Sorngdao	Wan (Lor)	1980
Tham Siikaew <sup>13</sup>	"	Kut-baak	Suwat	
Paa Sutthaawaat <sup>2</sup>	"	Meuang	Mahaa Thongsak	
Paa Baan Phai <sup>15</sup>	"	"	Sutham	
Tham Haan <sup>16</sup>	Norngkhaai	Sii Chiang Mai	Phuwang	
Paa Aranyawaasii <sup>22</sup>	"	Thaabor	Naak	1953
Hin Maak Peng <sup>2</sup>	"	Sii Chiang Mai	Thet	
Paan Daan Wiwek <sup>9</sup>	"	So Phisai	Thui	
Aranyabanphot <sup>2</sup>	"	Sii Chiang Mai	Rian	
Paa Saamakhii Thammaawaat	"	"	Chaalii	
Paa Phrasathit <sup>17</sup>	"	"	Buaphaa	
Paa Daan Sii Samraan <sup>9</sup>	"	Phon Jaroen	Tan	
Jetiyaakhiirwihaan (Phuuthork)	"	Beungkaan	Juan (Yaeng)	1980
Phra-ngaaamsiimongkhon	"	Thaabor	Ornsii (Phairot)	1982



Janaraaraam <sup>2</sup>	"	Meuang	Jan Khemapatto (Sathit)	1975
Paa Norng Sorng Horng <sup>18</sup>	"	"	Plang	
Paa Saensamraan <sup>19</sup>	Ubon	Waarinchamraap	Mahaa Phut (Suri)	Unknown
Norng Paa Phong	"	"	Chaa (Liam)	
Sanaamchai	"	Phibuunmangsaahaan	Ki	
Phuukhaokaew <sup>2</sup>	"	"	Dii Channo (Chot)	1959
Total number of forest monasteries visited				
Relatively unchanged except for building improvements (A)	Monasteries changed to study vocation ( <i>khanthathura</i> ), or village monasteries (B)		Monasteries in transition towards domestication (C)	Total (B + C)
40/72	22 (30.6%)		10 (13.9%)	32 (44.5%)

NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Present teacher (as distinct from founding teacher) marked by parentheses.
- <sup>2</sup> Monastery no longer residence for forest monks, now either urbanized and changed into scriptural study centre or village *wat*.
- <sup>3</sup> Disciple of Khamdii, branch monastery of Wat Thamphaapuumimit.
- <sup>4</sup> Sijjan is now Jao Khana Phaak (area 11).
- <sup>5</sup> Disciple of Kirng Arhimuttako (early pupil of Man).
- <sup>6</sup> Disciple of Ajaan Fan Aajaaro. Wat Thamphuwwua is near the Norngkhaai border.
- <sup>7</sup> No monastery identified; teacher died in the forest during wandering.
- <sup>8</sup> Disciple of Jan Khemasiri.
- <sup>9</sup> Second generation from Man, claiming affiliation to Mahaa Bua (Wat Paa Baan Taat).
- <sup>10</sup> Man stayed the rains period 1919 and 1924 here; it is now the village monastery; the present abbot has only five *phansaa* from Mahaasaarakhaam (not in the lineage of Man).
- <sup>11</sup> The monastery at the time of writing has no abbot/teacher.
- <sup>12</sup> Kuu was the older brother of Kwaa, both were the paternal cousins of Ajaan Fan Aajaaro (Wat Paa Udom Somporn); both cremated at Wat Paa Klaangnonphuu.
- <sup>13</sup> Second-generation monk claiming affiliation to Ajaan Fan Aajaaro (Man's early pupil, Wat Paa Udom Somporn).
- <sup>14</sup> Consisting of three interrelated *sammak* on the same mountain, Wat Tham Phet, Wat Tham Phuang, and Wat Tham Aphaidamrongtham.
- <sup>15</sup> Disciple of Ajaan Singthorng (Mahaa Bua's pupil).
- <sup>16</sup> Branch monastery of Wat Hin Maak Peng.
- <sup>17</sup> Claims affiliation to Man's teacher Ajaan Sao.
- <sup>18</sup> Affiliated to Mahaa Samaan and the line of Man's teacher, Ajaan Sao.
- <sup>19</sup> Established by Sao and Sing in 1936, now the monastery for scriptural studies (no longer a forest monastery).



## APPENDIX B

1. A village survey was carried out at Baan Naa Khaam, Paakhaat district, Norngkhaai province (about 100 kilometres from the town of Norngkhaai) to ascertain the range and intensity of support to Wat Paa Daan Wiwek, some 5 kilometres away compared with the contemporaneously established Wat Baan Naa Khaam (situated inside the village).

The site was selected for its recently settled communities and distinctive village and forest monasteries and relative isolation, 30 kilometres from the district town of Paakhaat (recently up-graded from minor-district), on dirt road. The survey also attempted to show perceived cognitive differences between the “village monastery” and the “forest monastery” and preferential locus for individual and collective merit-making; in this latter respect, to what extent merit-making (which includes ritual participation and general support and upkeep) was undertaken regularly, and at certain rituals during the year.

A later survey was also carried out at Baan Saeng Arun, the village which is now closest to the forest monastery, situated only 1 kilometre away and 4 kilometres from Baan Naa Khaam. Baan Seng Arun does not have a village monastery and tends to turn to Wat Baan Naa Khaam for certain ritual functions. Wat Paa Daan Wiwek was established in 1969, and then known as Wat Paa Baan Naa Khaam as this was the nearest village at that time. However, since then a satellite village emerged called Baan Saeng Arun, now the main supporter for the forest monastery.

Today both monasteries receive sufficient support from the local community, though the forest monastery also has influential outside patronage. The forest monastery is Thammayut whilst typically the village monastery is Mahaanikaai. There was no sense of inter-monastery conflict, neither was there any factionalism among the villagers over support for one or another monastery. In fact the increasingly well-known Thui Chanthakaro (Wat Paa Daan Wiwek) occasionally gives financial support to the Wat Baan, and thus is something of a local patron. The householders at Baan Naa Khaam no longer take a leading role in supporting the forest monastery since Baan Saeng Arun (112 householders) emerged (see also the discussion on Wat Paa Daan Wiwek in Chapter Eight).

The forest monks go on alms-round everyday to Baan Saeng Arun and another (non-related) small hived village at the rear of the monastery Baan Nonprasoet, 3 kilometres away. In fact these two villages have a somewhat strained relationship, the latter less involved with day-to-day affairs



of the forest monastery. Both village kin-groups when participating in joint rituals (only once or twice a year) tend to stay in distinct groups with the usual cross-cut divisions between sexes and men and children. Baan Nonprasoet lacks strong leadership, which Baan Saeng Arun has, and the latter won the Ministry of Interior's hegemonic award for its *klom ormsap* "savings group", coming first in the northern area of the Northeastern Region. Ajaan Thui and the highly motivated village leader take credit for this achievement. The headman went to Bangkok to receive the hegemonic award from the then Prime Minister Prem Tinsulanond.

Regardless of the firm relationship between villagers at Baan Saeng Arun and the forest *sangha* there are some important indigenous ceremonies not carried out in the monastery necessitating continuous linkage with Wat Baan Naa Khaam. These calendrical ceremonies include Bun Bangfai, Bun Phrawet, and traditional "rains" (rite of passage) ordination for village boys. Then there are non-calendrical rituals such as house blessings, life crisis rituals, and so on. Thus, for example, families at Baan Saeng Arun have to send their young boys for temporary ordination to Wat Baan Naa Khaam, some 4 kilometres away. Every potential inmate for the forest monastery has to be scrutinized carefully (see Appendix E) before the teacher will accept them.

From a random survey at Baan Naa Khaam (thirty householders, or 9 per cent of the total number of householders [270], which includes a cross-section of age and sex groups) in all cases the village monastery figured prominently as the focus of devotional activities, largely because it is seen as a multi-functional institution within the community itself. About half of the respondents proffer support to Wat Paa Daan Wiwek (such as food offering, helping in cooking food at the monastery, chores such as cutting grass, building repairs, clearing bush, digging, acting as driver for the teacher, and so on). In these cases, joint merit-making is concentrated during the principal Buddhist festivities and normative rituals (*Wisaaka-Buuchaa*, *Maakha-Buuchaa*, *Khao-phansaa* and *Ork-phansaa*, *kathin* and *ad hoc Phaa-paa* offerings). These respondents also occasionally visited the forest monastery on *Wan Phra* days, and about ten older members (over fifty years of age) stay overnight at the monastery keeping eight precepts.

There seemed to be little difference in respect of religious values, though perhaps performing distinct services (see also Kirsch's findings cited in the text). A typical normative response was the greater "faith" held in the Wat Paa because it is a practice *wat* [and] one who practises will see the real *dhamma* truths". On the other hand, villagers clearly indicated in the survey



their need for participation by monks in some of the many and diverse local ceremonies (*phithii Isaan*) at various times of the year. Eating habits drew a great deal of attention; many respondents explained that this was the most important noticeable difference. Forest monks mixed their food together in the bowl and ate only once a day whilst village monks eat with side dishes twice a day (that is with a forenoon meal, *phen*; Pali: *pacchimabhaddavela*).

Importantly, the village monastery (with one to three monks out of the rains retreat, and thirteen to fifteen monks and novices during the rains) consisted solely of local villagers whilst the forest monastery (seventeen monks and two novices, with a slightly higher number of monks during the rains) has non-kinship links with the local villages except for one novice and one monk (from Baan Saeng Arun). These are monks from outside, with a long-term commitment to remain as monks. Villagers' expectations would thus differ between various *sangha*. But perhaps the most important point of all is that villagers saw the village monastery as offering a viable basic secular-based and monastic (*nak tham* and *perian*) education programme, useful to both monastic and, after disrobing, secular careers.

Summary conclusions from the survey are as follows:

(i) Wat Paa

- Thammayut monastery;
- monks practise meditation and are disinterested in local concerns and rituals;
- strict rules and regulations for the monks;
- monks do not kill any living thing (animal or vegetable);
- monks practise to be free from suffering (liberating norm);
- monks eat once a day;
- monks are very tolerant (*ot-thon*) and live together peacefully.

(ii) Wat Baan

- *pariyat* monastery (*dhamma* and secular subjects);
- monks eat two meals a day;
- more rituals and more community involvement than Wat Paa;
- monks tend to be more concerned with accumulating material possessions (*wat thuu*);
- lax discipline;
- socio-cultural focus for village activities;
- monks can obtain an academic qualification just as town dwellers do, which will help them find a job after disrobing;
- convenient place to make merit because it is close to one's house;
- monastery keen on building and construction.



The villagers in the survey seemed to be aware of *nikaai* historic differences and see the Thammayut as a “practice” monastery, and the Mahaanikaai as concerned with “book learning” and perpetuation of local rites and rituals (see also Kirsch 1978). The reform *nikaai* is clearly associated with “purist” interpretation of the *dhamma-vinaya* and the link between the forest tradition and Thammayut is assumed to be a consequence of historic events. The villagers believe it is thus natural that the élite should be attracted to a movement which they themselves revived and where the royalty actively participate. In the survey it was confusing for the villagers to explicate the forest tradition from *nikaai*, especially when I mentioned that the Mahaanikaai also have “purist” forest monks whose interpretation of the *dhamma-vinaya* surpasses even many Thammayut urban (and forest) monasteries.

2. A second village survey was conducted at Baan Saeng Arun (25 per cent of total householders [112] interviewed, random selection across the village, male and female, ages ranging between twenty-seven and sixty-eight, average age being forty-three). The results showed that although the village is only 1 kilometre from the forest monastery, the community need to connect with Wat Baan Naa Khaam for calendrical local rituals, as mentioned in the Baan Naa Khaam survey (above). Normative ritual performances at the forest monastery were understood and in a sense admired but did not satisfy their customary ritual needs.

To the question which monastery did respondents normally support (*thambun*), eight respondents replied solely Wat Paa, whilst the rest, fourteen, said both monasteries, but at different times. None said just the village monastery. When asked in what way they supported the forest monastery, the answers were:

- by putting food into the monks’ bowls (*sai* or *tak-baat*);
- keeping the monastery clean;
- anything, if called on to help.

When asked to explain how they perceived the difference between the two monasteries, the answers were similar to the Baan Naa Khaam sample, though less descriptive,

- different regimen and application of monastery “rules” (*rabiap*);
- Wat Baan Naa Khaam is for “scriptural learning” (*pariyat-tham*), whereas



Wat Paa is for “practice” (*patibat*);

- different eating habits: Wat Paa has one meal, Wat Baan has two meals;
- monks receive food in different ways (by this it is assumed that firstly, at the forest monastery everyone, everyday, goes on alms-round, and all the monks share the food and eat collectively. At Wat Baan, only some monks go on alms-round, and not consistently, and the relatives of the inmates prepare special tiered food carriers [*pinto*] for them. At the village, the monks also usually eat separately except on collective ritual occasions. As well, supporters of Wat Baan at Baan Saeng Arun found Baan Naa Khaam too far away to *sai baat*, “place food in the bowl”, on alms-round);
- monasteries belong to different *nikaai*;
- Wat Baan is not as strict as Wat Paa;
- different ways of merit-making at Wat Baan and Wat Paa.

When asked to explain how they supported Wat Baan, respondents replied that they gave “donations” (*borijaak*) on ritual festivities, especially at rowdy Bun Bangfai. One female respondent commented that she preferred supporting Wat Paa because, in half jest, she enjoyed the sweets (*khanom*). In fact the quality of food at Wat Paa is better because at regular intervals outside supporters have recently sent in special food and fruits from Norngkhaai to be prepared in the monastery’s kitchen by village women before the collective morning meal.



## APPENDIX C

The *dhutanga* consist of thirteen practices which were thought to bring great benefit to the early practitioners.<sup>1</sup> These were purely optional rules made reputedly during the time of the Buddha. In permitting the *dhuta* rules, the Buddha clearly wanted a balance from the severe Indic asceticism favoured at the time, as well as the persistent request from Devadatta to make these rules obligatory.<sup>2</sup>

The *dhutanga* supplement and support the two foundation *principia*, meditation and moral discipline. The *dhutanga* are universal practices in the forest tradition, and account for similarities in life ways between formal divisions in the *sangha* (cross-cutting tendency). The significance of these rules to forest dwelling has been documented by Carrithers (1983, p. 66, *passim*) for Sri Lanka and Khantipalo (1965, p. 7) for Thailand.

Etymologically, the word *dhutanga* does not appear in the canon, though some of the practices are mentioned in the earliest sections (*Majjhima-nikaya*, III, 40–42 — which lists nine; *Anguttara-nikaya*, V, 181–90; in the *Vinaya-pitaka* mention is made of only four of the thirteen practices). The full thirteen practices are mentioned, though unfavourably, in a later appendix to the *Vinaya-pitaka*, the *Parivara*. This latter-mentioned work, probably of Sinhalese origin, attributes the ascetic practices as mental hindrances. Rhys Davids (in *Milinda-panha* [1928, pp. 268–69]) says in this regard, “it is clear therefore that the doctrine of the thirteen *dhutanga* is at variance with primitive Buddhism”. Rhys Davids goes on to say that the foundation of these rules are in the “older teaching, and nearly all of them have been praised or followed [to some extent] from early times”, though not as compulsory rules but “extra vows, conducive, but subsidiary to the ethical self-culture of the *arahant*”.

In the early centuries of the Christian era, there was some disagreement over the relevance of the *dhutanga* in Sri Lanka (Carrithers 1983, pp. 63–64), though they were at this time frequently practised. The *dhutanga* in two important non-canonical works of the early Christian era, the *Milinda-panha* (1928, p.353) and the great *Visuddhimagga* (II, 1 [Buddhaghosa 1975, p. 59]) praise these practices as a means of “purification”. There was nevertheless a possibility that monks practising the *dhutanga* may become arrogant and ostentatious in their attitude to other members of the *sangha*. Gombrich (1988, pp. 94–95) mentions that the Buddha may have been aware of this problem and warned that these rules should not be used for purposes other



than cultivating frugality. As it says in the *Visuddhimagga* (Buddhaghosa 1975, p. 83), these practices are to be undertaken for “perfecting those special qualities of fewness of wishes, contentment [with little], etc.”.

Briefly, the *dhutanga* practices are as follows:

1. wearing “rag-robes”;
2. possessing only three robes;
3. not omitting (or being selective) any house on alms-round.

The practice used to be to stop for a brief period outside every dwelling, moving on when it was evident that no food was to be offered. The attention must be focused on the bowl when food is offered, not the person offering the food. There are some minor variations to alms-round, *ipso facto* considered an exercise in mindfulness and proper deportment.

4. eating only one meal a day

This is common practice among Thai forest monks and those adherents of the stricter rules in the *Thammayut Nikaa*. In Sri Lanka this practice is very rarely followed (Gombrich 1988, p. 100; Carrithers 1983, p. 285).

5. eating alms-food only

This imposes a restraint on forest monks in Thailand, especially with regard to the extent of seclusion from human habitation (not in Sri Lanka, where as Carrithers [1983, pp. 27, 76, 285] has shown, the usual practice is for devotees to bring food to the hermitage and leave it in the alms-hall where the monks come and receive it).<sup>3</sup> In this respect, the *Mahavagga* mentions that a monk should live “neither too far from a village nor too near”.

6. eating from the bowl only, not using side dishes (thus all food offered had to be consumed mixed together in the one receptacle);
7. eating moderately, refusing any additional food offered after commencing eating (simplified as “no second helpings”);
8. forest dwelling (as the *Visuddhimagga* [Buddhaghosa 1975, p. 72] says, if a monk is temporarily away he must leave the confines of the village or town to meet the dawn in the forest);
9. living at the foot of a tree;
10. living in the open air, refusing a roof and a tree-root (although this practice may, according to Khantipalo [1965, p. 11], be undertaken sheltered by a tent of robes);



11. charnel-ground residence (though as these are no longer used for disposing of the dead, it is often interpreted as “cemetery dwelling”);
12. being content with sleeping at any dwelling place that is offered (presently taken to imply any dwelling allocated by the teacher);
13. living in three postures only: sitting, walking, and standing (never lying down, a practice undertaken by monks during intensive meditation for short periods of time).

In relation to the four primeval *Nissaya* (see *Mahavagga, Vinaya*, VIII, 1, 34–1, 35) the *dhutanga* tend to reinforce the basic though now largely redundant — rules pertaining to robes, alms-food, and shelter (the fourth *Nissaya* is the use of fermented urine as medicine).

The *dhutanga* are to be taken in part, the most common being number 2, although there are variations on getting around this rule. Khantipalo (1965, pp. 11–12) correctly mentions that in Thailand (during the 1970s) *dhutanga* numbers 1, 9, 10, and 11 were rarely observed by forest monks and only number 13 on specific occasions. Numbers 4, 5, 6, and 7 are most frequently practised. Practice number 8, “forest dwelling” is, of course, integral to the eremitic life. In any case, as Kern (1972, p. 75) says, the application of the *dhutanga* was only possible for those monks living in the forest.

Ajaan Man undertook seven or eight *dhutanga* consistently throughout his monastic life, with additional ones only on specific occasions.

## NOTES

1. See Nagasena’s remarks in the *Milinda-panha*. The whole of the “ninth section” is devoted to eulogizing these practices (see also Eliot [1971, vol. 1, p. 240]). The *Milinda-panha* was written around the first century AC and during this time, as Carrithers (1983, p. 64) notes, the *dhutanga* appear as a “necessary part of the meditator’s progress, as the badge of his commitment, and very nearly as an end in themselves”.
2. See Oldenberg (1971, p. 161). An account of Devadatta’s approach to the Buddha on five ascetic rules, including the making of forest dwelling compulsory, is to be found in the *Cullavagga (Vinaya)* [Horner 1975]).
3. According to one Sinhalese devotee, well-known forest hermitages are regularly booked up to a year ahead by enthusiastic merit-makers.



## APPENDIX D

Another indicator of change with regard to the decline of local long-term monks (see the discussion in Chapter Seven) may be seen in the traditional Lao and northeastern Thai ritual of *Hot Phra* or *Hot Song*. This was a method of inducing young monks regarded as possessing *khunatham* (indicating purity of behaviour, knowledge, and virtue) to stay in robes.

The ritual bathing was earlier noted by Tambiah (1970, pp. 109–15, with symbolic interpretations) in Udornthaanii and Keyes (1975*b*, pp. 186–87) in Mahaasaarakhaam. *Hot Phra* accords status and “luminosity” to the monk which he carries with him into lay life.

Villagers in the past performed this ceremony according to three levels of graded status, usually with five *phansaa* upwards. Local monks consider it powerful magic perhaps because of its compelling nature as they would have been socially obligated to remain in robes for at least another year. For this reason I was told that today some monks prefer to disrobe as soon as they found out they had been selected by the villagers. As it is hard to find monks with five *phansaa* and more, the minimum level for participating is now flexible (see also Tambiah [1970, p. 110] quoting an informant). The status accorded this “remarkable” ritual does not seem to be significant these days and certainly not enough to induce young men and boys to remain as monks.

The ritual with its corresponding grading system was briefly noted in Laos by Levy (1957, pp. 34–36), Vongsavanh and Chapelier (1973), and Kruong (1959, p. 257; Kruong lists six royal grades). Thao Nhouy Abhay (1959, p. 253) mentions lay titles common in Laos for former *Hot Phra* monks.

This practice was noted in the northeast during the early twentieth century by Wachirayaan (1971*d*, pp. 69–70). Wachirayaan, as head of the Sangha, was aware that it was the custom for villagers to select their abbots and *upatchaa* through this means, although he mentions that it should be the duty of the Jao Khana to recommend likely candidates for all local administrative positions. Wachirayaan felt that the reason villagers persist in this indigenous ritual was that the Jao Khana did not carry out their specified functions properly. At that time nominations for official ecclesiastical positions were endorsed by the king (or his representative). Wachirayaan said he could not see why villagers insisted on performing this ritual when they had a reasonable alternative sanctioned by none other than the (Thai) king. But



if they still wanted to *Hot Phra* then they should refrain from using official Siamese nomenclature in addressing their monks, Jao Hua and Somdet (titles used in the new administrative structure; see also Tambiah [1970, p. 110], who bemoaned the fact that this interesting parallel system of conferring titles had not hitherto been noted in Thailand). Wachirayaan went on to say that if monks had already been nominated by the central administration for formal ecclesiastical positions, then he would certainly not object to villagers performing *Hot Phra*. Seemingly, he did not like the local ritual in so far as this tended to obstruct his own *sangha* reforms, but was sensitive enough to try to gradually change local customs and bring them into conformity with the new Siamese system.

Wachirayaan noted that *Phuu noi* (monks with few rains) monks for the position of *upatchaa* were called *Saa*. *Phuu yai* (monks with many rains or monks with royal rank) were called *Hua Saa*. For abbot, *Phuu noi* were referred to as *Khuu* (northeastern for *Khruu* or “teacher”); *Phuu yai* were called *Hua Khuu* or “head *khruu*”. He said that if villagers wanted to perform this ritual they should not do so on monks with less than ten rains, but if in the sub-district there are no monks with ten rains and over, then five rains should be the norm. However, these more junior monks could only be referred to as *Khuu*, and could not thenceforth be nominated for positions of *upatchaa*. The *Hot Phra* system endorsed by Wachirayaan with the above provisos can be summarized as follows:

1. *Upatchaa*

$$Saa \begin{cases} Hua Saa (Phuu yai) \\ Saa (Phuu noi) \end{cases}$$

The above is for monks with ten rains and over.

2. *Jao-aa-waat* (abbot).

$$Khuu \begin{cases} Hua Khuu (Phuu yai) \\ Khuu (Phuu noi) \end{cases}$$

The above is for monks of lesser seniority (accepted minimum, five rains).

The contemporary *Hot Phra* ritual, as detailed by informants from two different districts in Norngkhaai province, is as follows:



1. First *Hot nam*

<i>Ayaa khuu</i>	}	Lower (one rains +)
<i>Jaan Saa</i>		

2. Second *Hot nam*

<i>Yaa Khuu Saa</i>	}	Mid-level
<i>Jaan Khuu</i>		

3. Third *Hot nam*

<i>Yaa Khuu</i>	}	Highest (5 rains +)
<i>Jaan Yaa Khuu</i>		

Keyes (1975*b*) also includes a fourth *Hot Phra* level, “Yaa Thaan”. In lay life monks were referred to as *Jaan* followed by their personal names, otherwise they would be simply called *Thit* (from Pali *Pandita*, meaning a wise person) to indicate that they had been monks but had not undertaken the “liminal” *Hot Phra*. In this system, those who had been novices were called *Siang*.



## APPENDIX E

Rules Concerning the Request for Ordination in the  
Wisungkhaamasiiimaa (*Feuk Obrom*), Wat Paa Daan Wiwek

1. Anyone wishing to ordain (either as a novice or monk) must first “practise” to change his habits for at least one to three years [as *ubaasak* or *phaa khao*, “white-robed eight preceptor”]; if the applicant has been married before, then at least three to six years, depending on one’s determination.<sup>1</sup>
2. Temporary [traditional] ordination during the *phansaa* for selected individuals may be possible, but restricted to a maximum of three persons in any one year; prior permission must be sought from the teacher and ordinands must have the intention of staying in the forest monastery.
3. Those ordinands intent on “book learning” must apply elsewhere, to the many monasteries specializing in this vocation.

Ordination for the purpose simply of local custom, rather than for the Buddha-*dhamma* will not be permitted at the forest monastery.

Performance of *Sangkhakam* is essential for a fully ordained monk. In the case of ordination ritual, the *upatchaa* has to announce the forthcoming ceremony in order that the *bhikkhu-sangha* may communally participate. At Wat Paa Daan Wiwek this announcement will take place three days beforehand and all resident monks are expected to join, except in special circumstances [this item was included because some forest monks may be disinclined to leave their secluded abodes and participate in *sangha* communal rituals].

If any lay supporter wishes to give *kappiyaphan* [appropriate gifts for monks] with “faith” on the day of the ordination, this is allowed provided they are necessary articles for monks [Thui was cautious not to receive excessive donations].<sup>2</sup> For those wishing to give to the [visiting] *upatchaa*, this is likewise permitted and a praiseworthy act.

SIGNED: Chanthakaro Bhikkhu [Ajaan Thui]

DATED: 3 November 2531 [1988]

WAT SAENG ARUN [Wat Paa Daan Wiwek]



## NOTES

1. This is usual at nearly all forest monasteries of either *nikaai* in my survey, as one has to be “assessed” by the teacher as to suitability for the forest monastic life.
2. In this respect it should be remembered that for Thai and Lao, the most meritorious act is sponsoring a candidate for *upasampada* ordination (see, for instance, Tambiah [1968, p. 59]). Support for *bhikkhu* ordination is preferred to noviate ordination, connected with the belief that the more precepts one keeps, the more meritorious for all concerned.



## SELECTED GLOSSARY OF FOREIGN TERMS

*aphinihaan* (Pali: *abhinna*): supranormal abilities/powers

*binthabaat* (Pali: *pindapata*): daily alms-round

*dhutanga* (Thai: *thudong*): special ascetic practices

*doen thudong*: to undertake ascetic wandering on foot

*itthirit* (Pali: *iddhi*): supernatural/psychic powers

*Jao Khana*: Siamese title for the monastic head of a place, for example, Jao Khana Amphoe (district)

*Jao Meuang*: local lords/governors

*jedii* (Pali: *cetiya*): traditional burial mounds associated with Buddhist saints

*Khaaluang*: Siamese royally appointed administrators or “commissioners”

*kammathaan* (Pali: *kammatthana*): the basis of meditation practice, implying the ascetic monks’ tradition

*kuti*: monks’ hut

*Mahaanikaai*: the larger of the two main sects in the Greater Thai Sangha, consisting of all monks other than those affiliated to the reform Thammayut sect

*meuang*: urban centre/town

*monthon*: an early Siamese locale administrative category used up until 1933

*nikaai* (Pali: *nikaya*): sect/religious order

*paathihaan*: miraculous/magical power



*paatimok* (Pali: *patimokkha*): the core disciplinary rules of the Buddhist *sangha* recited each fortnight in an important solidarity ritual

*pariyat* (Pali: *pariyatti*): the vocation of scriptural learning

*patibat* (Pali: *patipatti*): the vocation of meditation practice

*perian* (Pali: *parinnu*): Pali studies; a monk formally recognized as attaining higher Pali learning

*phansaa* (Pali: *vassa*): the traditional three-month rains retreat period and method of calculating a monks' seniority (as annual cycles)

*Phra*: monk

*rai* (Thai unit of land measurement): one *rai* = 1,600 square metres

*saiyasaat*: mystical/magical powers (as in black magic)

*saksit*: sacred powers relating to persons and objects

*samnak/samnak song*: an officially unregistered/unsanctified monastic centre

*sangha* (Pali): the Buddhist order of monks and nuns (literally, implying in lower case a grouping of at least four fully ordained monks)

*Sangkhakam* (Pali: *Sanghakamma*): the formal acts or ceremonial performance of *sangha* rituals

*Thammayut* (Pali: *Dhammayuttika-nikaya*): the smaller of the two Thai Buddhist sects started by King Rama IV as an élitist reform movement

*thudong* (Pali: *dhutanga*): the special ascetic practices associated mainly with forest-dwelling; often used with the term *kammathaan*

*uparaat*: royally appointed viceroy

*upatchaa* (Pali: *upajjhaya*): an ecclesiastical preceptor during the ordination ritual; or someone formally qualified to perform this *sangha* task

*winai* (Pali: *vinaya*): the minutiae and rules pertaining to the Buddhist *sangha*

*wipatsanaa* (Pali: *vipassana*): the traditional introspective meditation practice



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*Forest Monks and the Nation-State* is a detailed study on the ascetic forest monk tradition in the Lao-speaking provinces of northeastern Thailand in the wake of the early twentieth century politico-religious reforms. The narrative alternates between the periphery and the capital, dealing with historic transformations and persistencies in the social field of wandering forest monks as well as the contemporary impact of this monastic tradition in the wider social and political milieu. The writer uses original ethnographic materials and provides a rare insight into the formation of monastic lineages and the local politico-religious histories of present-day northeastern Thailand.

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